

cca news



Incarnation: Central to Our Mission
Global Christian Forum in Asia • Rerouting Mission
Mobilising the Church to Respond to HIV/AIDS
Can We Make a Difference?

Peace Be with You— Do Not Be Afraid

Glory to God in the highest, on earth, peace be among people.
Do not be worried and upset; do not be afraid.

As we approach another Christmas and the end of the year 2006, we look back and remember with gratitude God's blessings throughout the year. We also remember with gratitude the support and love that we receive from member churches and councils and ecumenical friends.

This year, the story of 'Christmas,' the birthday of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ, comes to us once again at a time of much despair, hopelessness and fear. There is so much that causes this despair, hopelessness, fear and darkness in our world today. Conflict, confrontations, wars and fighting continue in many parts of the globe. As the gap widens between the rich and the poor in many (if not all) of our societies, there is a growing restlessness about corrupt and inefficient governance with no concern for people's security, much less for their freedom or for genuine peace and justice of the country.

In some places, those who question the status quo and clamor for human rights and for social transformation are stigmatised, kidnapped, or even killed, as terrorists or enemies of the state.

But it is precisely in the darkness and gloom of despair, hopelessness and fear that God's short but powerful message, 'Peace be with you, don't be afraid,' once again becomes a challenge for us, the followers of Christ today. It is an assurance that we are not alone in what we are going through—for 'Immanuel, God is with us always.' It is an assurance that our troubles do not have the final word—God wills for us 'life in its fullness.' It is an assurance that God is working with us and through us: 'As the Father sent me so I send you, don't be afraid.'

What a happy night this was to the poor shepherds keeping their watch in the open field and the darkness of night. The angels came upon them and the glory of the Lord shone round about them. The poor shepherds were struck with horror and were sore afraid.

But when God strikes God's people with terror, it is often an introduction to some signal blessing. The first appearance may seem like that of a



great destroyer, but God will at length make God-self known as God is, and allay the fears of God's people. So the angel said, 'Do not be afraid and tremble, but behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy and peace on earth, which shall be to all people—to Jews and gentiles, to north to south, to all nations, races, tribes and languages, to rich and poor, to free and marginalised communities.

The Christian Conference of Asia affirms this gift and task of peace-building as we remain committed to 'Building Communities of Peace for All' in our region and in the world in the years to come.

May this be a truly meaningful Christmas for all of us!

—Prawate Khid-arn



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Global Christian Forum in Asia

CCA holds intrafaith meetings with Catholics and Evangelicals

'There must be something good and beautiful about coming together'

Since the 19 September night coup d'état in Thailand was waged rather quietly, the scheduled meeting of the Asian Ecumenical Committee (AEC) at the Bangkok Christian Guest House proceeded as planned on 20 September, while our Evangelical and Pentecostal friends were arriving that day for the Global Christian Forum in Asia on 21–23 September. The Christian Conference of Asia coorganised and hosted both meetings.

Reconfirming Ongoing Partnership and Cooperation with Catholics

The Asian Ecumenical Committee is a joint committee of CCA and FABC (Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences), consisting of seven representatives each. The committee is a concrete manifestation of the partnership between the two bodies to work together for Christian unity in the spirit of the motto, 'Everything that we can do together let us not do separately.'

After brief introductions to the nature and structure of each organisation and a review of the history of the partnership that goes back to 1993, the AEC reconfirmed the ongoing relationship and cooperation. Such a partnership for unity and cooperation is to be at three levels—joint projects, cooperation in each other's projects or reciprocal invitation and joint staff meeting.

The AEC also decided to jointly hold the fourth seminar—called Asian Movement for Christian Unity (AMCU)—in June 2007 in Kuala Lumpur, to jointly hold the third Asia Conference of Theological Students sometime in October 2007 and to jointly plan for a joint staff meeting and retreat in November 2007 in Chiang Mai.

Archbishop Capalla of FABC suggested that evaluating the strengths and weaknesses of the joint cooperation should focus on the reason for the sustainability of our groups. 'There must be something good and beautiful about coming together,' he said.



Participants at the Global Christian Forum in Asia



Hubert van Beek (left) giving the background of the Global Christian Forum. Anthony Row (centre) from CCA moderated this session

This will be part of the joint staff meeting and retreat.

The members of the AEC are (from CCA) Henriette Hutabarat Lebang (Indonesia), Dhirendra Kumar Sahu (India), James Haire (Australia), Yakob Mar Iranios (India, Orthodox), Samuel Lin (Taiwan), Francisco de Vasconcelos (Timor Leste) and Hope S. Antone (Philippines) and (from FABC) Archbishop Fernando Capalla (Philippines), Tom Michel (Rome), Gabriel Baroi (Bangladesh), Lina Chan (Hong Kong), Caroline Soon (Malaysia), Francis d' Sa (India), and Clemens Mendonca (India).

Expanding the Circle—with Evangelicals and Pentecostals

The CCA and FABC coorganised the Global Christian Forum (GCF) in Asia on 21–23 September on the theme, 'Affirming Our One Saviour in Common Witness.' This was a follow-up to the Hong Kong 2004 event that brought participants of Evangelicals and Pentecostals along with Catholics and mainline Protestants and that suggested that CCA, FABC and the Evangelicals and Pentecostals in Asia hold an Asian gathering.

All AEC participants attended this meeting with six representatives of Evangelical and Pentecostal communities in Asia: Silawech Kanjanamukda (Thailand), Joshua Ogawa (Japan), Richard Howell (India), S.K. Xavier (Sri Lanka), Efraim Tendero (Philippines) and Joseph Suico (Philippines).

Others present were Nantiya Pechgate, Manit Maneewong and Chaiporn Panya (all theological

faculty in Thailand), Ketut Eddy Cahyana (CCA intern) and Woranuch Pramuakarn (CCA support staff). Anthony Row, an executive committee member of CCA, who was present in the Hong Kong event, also joined the CCA contingent.

Hubert van Beek, secretary of the Global Christian Forum and a former staff member of the World Council of Churches, provided the background to the meeting, making links to Hong Kong and other regional events and to future directions of GCF.

In the good Pentecostal tradition of sharing faith journeys, each shared their personal stories of having come to hold our faith and of transcending denominational identities. A good number from CCA and FABC spoke of their challenging and meaningful relationships with people of other faiths that have helped to broaden their own faith.

Each of the three bodies (CCA, FABC and the Evangelical Fellowship in Asia) had an opportunity to lead morning worship with Bible study. The Bible study leaders were Henriette Hutabarat Lebang of CCA, Tom Michel of FABC and Efraim Tendero of EFA.

Using the image of one body in Romans 12:1–8, Ery Hutabarat Lebang explained the meaning of unity as something that cannot be reduced to sheer uniformity for it underlines the diversity of many parts of the body. It points to the plurality of faith expressions rooted in the richness of God's gifts, which must be used to promote unity rather than discord, she said. 'We need to learn how to live in harmony,' which requires us to respect each other, provide space for creative dialogue through which

Three keys to the door to unity—humility with the attitude of learning from others in approaching others, gentleness that shows in not excluding, alienating or exterminating others and patience in bearing one another since problems do not get solved overnight

we can learn from and enrich each other, appreciate the differences and work together for our common witness.’

Reflecting on unity in the body of Christ as described in Ephesians 4:1–13, Tom Michel cited three keys to the door to unity—humility with the attitude of learning from others in approaching others, gentleness that shows in not excluding, alienating or exterminating others and patience in bearing with one another since problems do not get solved overnight. He said that after entering the door to unity, what we need to do is support and bear one another in love. There are seven elements or bases of our unity—one body, one Spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Parent of all. ‘While we are united in these elements, we still have to work until we reach unity in the faith,’ he said.

Reflecting on the same text, in Ephesians 4:1–16, Efraim Tendero described unity as being both inclusive and exclusive, the work of God and people, and as being both permanent and fragile. What helps to promote unity are humility, meekness, patience and love. Unity involves recognising diversity of gifts for a unified purpose and where everyone is needed. Speaking of the Global Christian Forum as an open space that is both inclusive and exclusive, Tendero said we need to affirm our relationship with Jesus, concentrate on agreement, define common agendas, speak the truth in love and be committed to one another.

In the same manner, each of the three bodies shared a reflection on the theme, ‘Affirming Our One Saviour in Common Witness’. Presenters were D.K. Sahu of CCA, Tom Michel of FABC and Richard Howell of EFA.

D.K. Sahu spoke of convergence of a gathered community, highlighting the need for ‘creating space for conversation, fellowship and movement oriented to strengthen, challenge and complement

each other.’ Speaking of Christianity as an essential challenge to the communities of faith, cultures and ideologies in Asia, Richard Howell said that theological differences among various denominations are a major obstacle to Christian unity and the alignment of ecumenism with institutional churches a major hindrance to coming together for witness.

Speaking from a Catholic perspective, Tom Michel described the journey of the Catholic Church into ecumenism marking the Vatican Council as the turning point of recognising other churches, congregations and communities as also channels of grace. For the Catholic Church, three approaches or streams in ecumenism are ecumenism of structure (such as by being a member of various ecumenical councils), ecumenism of doctrine (working to resolve doctrinal difficulties) and ecumenism of spirituality or spiritual ecumenism (such as through praying together).

The GCF in Asia was a time to get acquainted with each other personally as well as organisationally. Hope Antone introduced CCA while Tom Michel introduced FABC. The Evangelicals and Pentecostals do not have one common structure—although some classical Pentecostal groups are part of the Evangelicals there are many independent groups that are not.

The GCF was also a time of commitment to carry the forum process in Asia forward. To begin with, it was suggested that the three bodies make use of and respect the existing process of joint cooperation between CCA and FABC and that this can be opened to EFA and Pentecostals either as observers initially or as full partners who coown the programs. Two such programs of joint cooperation are the Asian Movement for Christian Unity (AMCU) and the Asia Conference of Theological Students (ACTS).

—Hope S. Antone

Letter to the Editor

I write this letter to express my deepest appreciation of the great job you are doing with *CCA News*. I just received a copy of the September 2006 issue and finished reading it. It is highly informative, clearly written, comprehensive in scope and purposeful in content. As a former CCA-related person away from the region, I

have been fully satisfied with *CCA News* as a valuable source of staying in the loop concerning old friends and familiar initiatives. *CCA News* is doing a great job. I appreciate its presence and hope it will grow from year to year.

Best wishes,
Rakesh Peter Dass

Roundtable Meeting

Partnership and fellowship as God's stewards

ACCA Roundtable Meeting was held on 30–31 October 2006 in Chiang Mai, Thailand. Dr Prawate Khid-arn, the CCA's general secretary, in welcoming the participants, told them the meeting was historic as it was the first CCA full roundtable meeting organised after the 2005 General Assembly, under the new leadership team and in CCA's new home in Chiang Mai. The event indicated the sincere concern and continued commitment of ecumenical partners to God's mission and ecumenical journey in Asia.

Dr Mathews George Chunakara, WCC's Asia Secretary and coordinator of the roundtable meeting, signified the meeting as a place of sharing the life and mutual concern and commitment among God's people.

The meeting listened to and reflected on various programs and activities of CCA during the past sixteen months, reported by executive secretaries. Under theme, 'Building Communities of Peace for All', mandated by the General Assembly for the next five years, there are four major mission goals:

- To strengthen Christian faith and spiritualities and to promote Asian Christian theologies.
- To develop human resources for social development and sustainability of life.
- To enhance ecumenical networking and the relationship and cooperation within the Christian communities and with other faiths.
- To strengthen CCA's organisational capacity and enhance the sense of ownership by its constituents.

The reports were well received and the frank and sincere debates and critical discussions were meaningful. It was agreed that impact of programs in the life of the churches and communities should be included in the report, and that program priorities be continued.

External evaluation is needed for CCA to assess how much its mission is being accomplished, and the strengths and weaknesses of ecumenical movement in the life of CCA in the past fifty years

identified. It was recommended that an evaluation team be set up, comprised of at least two external evaluators, persons who know CCA and the ecumenical movement but not directly involved in program planning and implementation of CCA.

For stronger and closer relationships and continued sharing between CCA and ecumenical organisations and churches in Europe, it was agreed that a CCA team visit be organised some time in 2007.

Ecumenical partners also shared their organisational situation—organisational policies, structures and personnel adjustments and changes.

The general secretary affirmed that together with its partners CCA has accomplished much. However there is still much more to do and much energy is needed in our ecumenical journey in the years ahead.

The participants in the roundtable were confident that the partnership and fellowship as God's stewards would continue to grow and that together CCA and ecumenical organisations can address the diverse challenges faced by churches and the ecumenical movement to build communities of peace for all—communities that respect human dignity, human rights, social unity, harmony and sustainability.

'We belong to each other and we make each other complete in Jesus Christ.'

CCA staff and officers with ecumenical partners at the roundtable meeting



Making Church Competent

Mobilising the church to respond to HIV and AIDS

'The challenge before churches is to place HIV and AIDS issues within the story of the gospel,' said Dr Prawate Khid-arn, General Secretary of the Christian Conference of Asia, in his keynote address at the Ecumenical AIDS Consultation on 'Making Church Competent' held in Chiang Mai on 20–24 November 2006. Following are some of the highlights of his address to the participants at the Ecumenical AIDS Consultation.

HIV and AIDS are no longer something we can assign to someone else to sort out

HIV and AIDS continue to threaten people around the world. In some countries, the number of newly infected cases has reduced. But the latest figures of the people living with HIV/AIDS globally show an increase in 2006. An estimated 39.5 million people are now living with HIV. Of that total, 4.3 million became infected this year. There have been 2.9 million AIDS deaths in 2006, the highest number reported in any year. The epidemic remains extremely dynamic as the virus exploits new opportunities for transmission.

The HIV and AIDS pandemic goes beyond any boundary. We are all living with and vulnerable to HIV and AIDS.

People living with HIV and AIDS are still being isolated. Often when their infection is known to the community their basic rights and opportunities are violated—through lack of access to treatment or discrimination in education and health care and other public services. Women and children are most vulnerable and must be included in the churches' strategy to combat HIV and AIDS.

In making the church competent, Dr Prawate Khid-arn elaborated on three strategies—listening to divine teaching, listening to indigenous wisdom and cultures and comprehensive intervention.

HIV and AIDS pose a particular challenge for churches' theological and pastoral stands. They present physical, psychological, social and spiritual challenges, not just to the victims, but to everyone. Churches are not only fighting against the HIV virus and AIDS, but are also striving for the fullness of life of people and for sustainable communities. This calls for a unique pastoral response

to HIV and AIDS in each region and country. HIV and AIDS are no longer something we can assign to someone else to sort out. To run away is to deny responsibility in the face of injustice and suffering. The stigmatisation of an individual is also a sin against the creator God, in whose image all human beings are made.

In stoning people living with HIV and AIDS, the church is stoning itself and the Lord Jesus Christ:

- who stood with people who were marginalised, discriminated against and stigmatised,
- who upheld basic human dignity and human rights,
- who healed not only physical ailments but understood and healed the deep scars and wounds inflicted by society,
- who wept and empathised with human suffering,
- who dared to say, 'Whoever one of you has committed no sin may throw the first stone.'

HIV/AIDS is not only a health crisis, it is also a crisis that is harming basic human dignity and human rights—the right to live, the right to survive and the right to access public services. The church must struggle to find the correct balance between the rights and responsibilities of individuals and communities regarding HIV and AIDS. It must move beyond the theoretical and legal debates to the practical implementation of protecting the rights and dignity of people living with HIV and AIDS.

Listening to indigenous culture and wisdom beyond searching for herbal medicines or indig-

enous ways of treatment—rather it strives for the local communal spirit of caring for each other in the community.

HIV and AIDS require a comprehensive approach. Prevention of HIV and AIDS as well as addressing their socioeconomic impacts requires the active involvement of churches and their leaders. Therefore strategies to address the disease at global and regional levels require an understanding of all religions. Interfaith strategies should ideally incorporate all religious views and attitudes towards HIV and AIDS for maximum impact.

Churches are deeply committed to working on an interfaith and multireligious basis in response to HIV and AIDS. This work needs all people of goodwill. With sensitivity and care, a common response can save lives and build deeper understanding and cooperation.

The church should continue to seek to listen and learn from the experience of other traditions, to seek out opportunities for multireligious exchange and networking related to HIV and AIDS at a local level.

Networking will give greater strength and swifter results to our common work. Therefore churches must share information and experiences openly, to enhance each other's work and to learn from other churches, NGOs, institutions, government agencies and faiths.

The church is called to take the responsibility seriously in various areas:

- The promotion of a theology of life, reaffirming that AIDS is not a sin nor a punishment from God.
- Breaking the culture of silence, ignorance and denial in the face of human suffering.
- Challenging the health policies of governments to pursue people-centred and life-centred development.
- Encouraging church leaders and workers to gain scientific knowledge and capacity skills to combat the disease and control the spread of this deadly virus. Training on capacity building needs to be put into place at all levels.
- Joining hands with other peoples' organisations, including association with people living with HIV and AIDS.
- Being visible in the suffering and struggle of the people. Global communities need to strengthen each other—cooperation, not competition. (See Interfaith Pre-Conference on Access for All, 9–10 July 2004, Bangkok, Thailand.)

Much has been achieved by the churches. However, much more still needs to be done in the years ahead to prevent and control the spread of the HIV virus and to care for infected people. Churches have to run toward the goal—to help people become free from HIV and AIDS, and to sustain healthy lives. The challenge before churches is to place HIV and AIDS issues within the story of the gospel—the message of Christ's love—that allows HIV and AIDS to be understood in a way that is respectful and life giving for all. (John 10:10)

Global Summary of the AIDS Epidemic, December 2006

	<i>Estimate</i>
Number of people living with HIV in 2006	
Total	39.5 million
Adults	37.2 million
Women	17.7 million
Children under 15 years	2.3 million
People newly infected with HIV in 2006	4.3 million
AIDS deaths in 2006	
Total	2.9 million
Adults	2.6 million
Children under 15 years	380,000

Regional HIV and AIDS Statistics, 2006

<i>Region</i>	<i>Estimate</i>
Sub-Saharan Africa	24.7 million
Asia	8.5 million
North America, Western and Central Europe	2.1 million
Latin America	1.7 million
Eastern Europe and Central Asia	1.7 million
North Africa and Middle East	460,000
Caribbean	250,000
Oceania	81,000
Global total	39.5 million

Source: UNAIDS WHO AIDS epidemic update: special report on HIV/AIDS December 2006

Living with HIV/AIDS

In solidarity with global communities to combat HIV and AIDS pandemic, CCA, the CCT AIDS Ministry (CAM), the Asian Interfaith Network on HIV/AIDS (AINA), local government departments, non-governmental organisations, church-based organisations, religious organisations and association of the people living with HIV and AIDS launched various activities in Thailand.

Capacity Building for Leaders

Around 150 participants representing Buddhists, Christians (Protestant and Catholic) and Muslims participated in the 'Capacity Building for Religious and Community Leaders on AIDS'. This was held during 15–17 November 2006 at Doi Sakhet Temple in Chiang Mai, Thailand.

Ecumenical Consultation



The Annual Ecumenical HIV/AIDS Consultation was held in Chiang Mai on 20–24 November 2006. Forty participants from twelve countries in Asia took part in this joint event between CCA, the Church of Christ in Thailand AIDS Ministry and the Catholic Commission for Public Health Care.

New Shelter



The dedication service of a new shelter for the PHWA, 'Baan Sabaay' was held on 1 December 2006. Baan Sabai (peace home) is a new shelter mainly supported financially by churches and organisations in Japan.

Intersectoral Campaign



Over 500 people participated in the intersectoral campaign on HIV/AIDS held at the Buddha Sathan Convention Hall in downtown Chiang Mai on 25 November 2006. This was jointly organised by religious organisations, NGOs and local government departments. Activities included a thematic presentation, folk drama, a storytelling contest, a drawing contest and an activity exhibition.

World AIDS Day



On 2 December, to commemorate World AIDS Day, CCA and the CCT AIDS Ministry staff divided into four teams to visit six HIV/AIDS centres in Chiang Mai and Chiang Rai provinces, to lunch with children and orphans, and to give 'Christmas' gifts to them.

New and Relevant

Theological training for Cambodian pastors



It is hoped that Cambodian Christians will be empowered and inspired to articulate their own Khmer theology

The teachings on pluralism and multiculturalism, feminist theology and contextual theology were all very new and relevant for us. Please come again and let us learn some more.' Such were among the evaluation comments made by the twenty-six participants of the Theological Teachers' Training on 25–30 November held at Kampong Som City, a three-hour bus ride from Cambodia's capital city of Phnom Penh.

The program was originally planned by the Faith, Mission and Unity (FMU) program area of CCA for theological education by extension teachers for Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia but only pastors and church leaders from Cambodia were able to make it to the training.

Three resource persons from outside Cambodia took turns in facilitating the training. They were Dr Gaikwad Roger, director of the theological education by extension program of the Serampore University in Kolkata, India, whose inputs included 'The Importance of Theological and Ministerial Formation for Churches' and 'Reading the Bible from Multireligious Contexts', Dr A. Wati Longchar, CCA-WCC consultant for Ecumenical Theological Education, whose inputs included 'Contemporary Trends in Theology—Asian Theologies' and 'Reading the Bible from Marginalised Perspectives' and Dr Hope S. Antone, CCA joint executive secretary for Faith, Mission and Unity, whose inputs included 'Contemporary Trends in Theology—Asian Feminist Theology' and 'Reading the Bible from a Feminist Perspective'. Of the twenty-six participants, the majority of whom were self-made pastors, six were women. While the women tended to

be more exposed to feminist theologising—because of the work of Ms Dominica Faurillo, an ecumenical accompanier sent by CCA—the participants expressed that contextual, feminist and pluralist readings of the Bible were a totally new experience. They were very open to the new learning.

'It is true that women work so hard and have multiple tasks and burdens—that is very true of our mothers and our wives. So we cannot disagree with feminist theology,' said Uy Dy, the administrative assistant of the young Kampuchea Christian Council, which hosted the training.

'While we share the good news of our faith, we must give people freedom to decide on their religion,' said Yew Ee Aun, a 25-year-old pastor of a three-year-old church who helped in the translation of some inputs from English to Khmer.

'Is there a school or seminary that offers short courses in contextual theology?' queried one of the participants, a former philosophy teacher at a university in Cambodia.

All these comments reflect an openness to and excitement about the things they learned at the training.

Exposed mostly to traditional ways of reading the Bible and doing mission brought by foreign missionaries into Cambodia, the group felt that there was something new in the training that speaks of their Cambodian and Asian contexts. Resource persons emphasised the need for theology to be grounded in Asian realities—with our problems of poverty and injustice, globalisation and terrorism, plurality of many dimensions of life.

The program seeks to train pastors and theological teachers in places where there is a lack of formal ecumenical theological education.

Pastors in Cambodia, ranging from the age of 25 to 60 and above, are generally self-made pastors who have learned the 'tricks of the trade' (mainly evangelism, preaching and mission) through the work of missionaries in Cambodia. They are usually not ordained because their churches are independent churches and there is no mechanism or national church body to look after the ordination process.

The program will continue for at least two years with the same group while another series will begin with a new group in order to multiply the effect.

CCA as an expression of the ecumenical movement has been a strong promoter of Asian theologising that is immersed in Asian realities and uses Asian resources.

Through the program, FMU staff team Hope Antone and Wati Longchar hope that Cambodian Christians will be empowered and inspired to articulate their own Khmer theology.

—Hope S. Antone and A. Wati Longchar

Human Trafficking

Human rights training looks at a big challenge for Asia

On 10 December 1948 the United Nations adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, proclaiming its determination to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war, re-affirming faith in fundamental human rights.

Half a century later, the world is still far from tranquil. Strife and turmoil, due to religious fundamentalism, communalism and ethnic conflicts, with a total disregard for human dignity and human rights, prevail in many regions of the world. Developing countries find themselves in greater economic difficulties, and their people are suffering. These are the stumbling blocks in the realisation of the protection of human rights. The situation demands immediate attention from world bodies and other responsible agencies to promote peace and understanding among the peoples of the world.

The promotion of the concept of human rights has been on the ecumenical agenda for a long time. The ecumenical movement's involvement in upholding human dignity and its efforts to help people in their struggle against human rights violations have brought new dimensions and insights to the life and witness of churches in several parts of the world. However, many churches are not giving serious attention to promoting human rights concerns. Quite often churches forget the fact that they must take positive initiatives. In a world filled with glaring absences of human rights and with many social conflicts, the churches must be aware of the need to protect human dignity and human rights at every level of society. Many consider that the struggle for human rights and advocacy for human rights as a political activity or mere secular involvement. But advocacy for human rights is an activity that upholds and enhances the dignity and worth of human beings, which is the manifestation of love, the core of our fundamental faith. The human rights violations taking place in our midst are a denial of love.

Human Rights Training

In this regard, thirty participants, including resource persons, from fourteen countries in Asia gathered at Crystal Spring House in Chiang Mai, Thailand, on 11–17 November 2006 for CCA's Tenth Annual Human Rights Training.

The training began with an opening worship, with an inspiring and challenging message by Rev. Dr Rienzie Perera, who challenged participants to go back to their countries as God's messengers or ambassadors in the pursuit of a just, peaceful and humane society. CCA will be instrumental in equipping church people/workers, priests and leaders alike to work together with people from other faiths or no faith for the protection and preservation of human life.

The Rev. Dr Tso Man King facilitated participatory biblical-theological reflections on human rights using the Old and New Testaments. The idea of human rights lies at the very core of the biblical narratives. The life and sacrifice of Jesus Christ manifest the worth of every individual. The affir-



Participants at the Tenth Annual Human Rights Training, held at Crystal Spring House, Chiang Mai, Thailand

mation that every human being is made in God's image carries profound significance. It has weighty implications for the defence of human rights. The emphasis of the gospel on the value of all human beings created in the image of God, on the atoning and redeeming work of Christ that gives to human beings true dignity, means that, as Christians, we have to reaffirm our commitment to work more fervently for the elimination of all forms of inhumanity.

The churches in Asia should take a firm stand to dedicate themselves with renewed vigour to raising the consciousness of people, to equip them to work for the implementation of human rights and for the demonstration of their faith.

Ms Kim Soo A concluded that problems on human rights violations can be solved, but not all human rights violations can be solved, so to help more human rights victims we need to break the walls that limit us in our work in helping these people.

We need to ask for the help of other support groups, not only from our local countries but also from other Asian countries as well, such as the Asia Human Rights Commission, which is based in Hong Kong.

Ms Mandy Tibbey gave information on the UN Mechanism and Instrument on Human Rights. She identified three main stages:

- identification of problems and issues,
- transformation into legal terms,
- the means to enforce them.

She also indicated how countries should work with the human rights instruments and drew attention to the very important convention on the human rights of the child.

Dr Mark Tamthai from the Institute for the Study of Religion and Culture at Payap University in Chiang Mai also made a presentation on the mechanisms and procedures on how to monitor human rights violations in Asia.

Exposure Trip

The participants went for a two-day exposure trip to Mae Sai on the Thai-Burmese border. The exploration was basically on human trafficking and violations of the rights of women and children.

Article 3 of the UN Trafficking Protocol defines trafficking as involving the use of force or other coercion, abduction, fraud, deception or abuse of power for the purpose of the exploitation of others, including prostitution, forced labour, practices similar to slavery or the removal of organs. People, mostly children and women, are trafficked espe-

cially if they are poor or vulnerable, for example if they have relatives who are prostitutes or drug addicts or they are orphans, often due to HIV/AIDS and/or drugs. Women are vulnerable due to poverty and previous exploitation.

Combatting Trafficking

The ILO's view is that a package of measures is necessary to combat trafficking, including prevention by strengthening local communities economically and socially, the provision of education and skills for earning a decent livelihood and the prosecution of traffickers. The cooperation of governments, NGOs, communities and families is necessary.

Poverty and vulnerability due to family violence, including sexual violence, drug addiction, lack of education, political insecurity and economic marginalisation have forced many people, especially children and women, into child labour, sexual exploitation and harsh conditions of work in foreign countries.

People from Myanmar, Laos, Cambodia, South China, Vietnam, Thailand and other countries are targeted by unscrupulous recruiters. They paint beautiful pictures of life in other countries and trick or force people into dangerous working and living conditions.

In Thailand many trafficked people are from Myanmar, because of the common border. Social workers and police work together to understand whether people have been trafficked and, if so, who is responsible.

In some cases, people are taken back to their home country. In others, the Thai government assists them with vocational training and to find jobs and shelter. Private agencies, social workers and police work cooperatively to assist the victims of trafficking.

Problems faced by those who are trafficked include language barriers, fear and trauma.

Governments have not given sufficient priority to an integrated, cross-border approach to prevention, protection and prosecution. A package of measures is needed, involving families, churches, government agencies, community groups, employers, trade unions and international agencies.

Human trafficking destroys lives, communities and human dignity. Many countries are affected, both the countries of origin and the countries of destination.

At the end of the training the participants came up with some recommendations to the churches (see column at right).

—Tony Waworuntu

- Get in touch with people and groups working with those who are exploited through being trafficked.
- Take action to strengthen local communities in terms of sustainable livelihoods, building strong families and providing community support, especially for the marginalised.
- Become involved in helping those who have escaped harsh conditions through the provision of shelter, food and alternative means of livelihood.
- Assist in the identification and prosecution of traffickers.
- Advocate a whole-of-government approach to eradicating human trafficking.
- Monitor the effectiveness of the churches and governments in adequately addressing the problem of human trafficking.
- Spread information about the problems of human trafficking to warn and to educate all members of society.
- Strengthen international church and NGO networks of information and advocacy.

From Invisibility to Visibility

Indigenous Women and Asian Feminist Theology

I have experienced discrimination since birth. My parents believe and follow the culture (Iban) that men control the home. I'm the eldest, a girl, and my father couldn't accept it. I was not allowed to go to school, but very independent, I ran away to my aunt who sent me to school.

Midway at seminary, I had to stop and make a choice. If you became a pastor you were not allowed to marry. If you did marry you could only work part-time. So I made a promise to remain single. For ordination, we women had to apply while men didn't need to.

I was ordained in 1991. Up to now in our congregations and communities I still hear people say, 'She's single with no children, how can she be a leader? If single, how can you be complete?' If you're not married, you're not really accepted by the community.

—Rev. Elizabeth Enjut, District Superintendent, Methodist Church in Malaysia

Indigenous women from Australia, Malaysia, the Philippines and Taiwan gathered at the Asia Pacific Theological Seminary in Baguio City in the Philippines on 12–19 September 2006. They were Bungulung, Iban, Tayal, Amis, Rhekay, Paiwan, Kankana-ey, Aeta, Isnag, Ibaloi, Applai-Kankana-ey, Ilocano-Bago, Saludnon, Gaddang and Tingguian.

Marilia Schuller of WCC Program to Combat Racism opened this third subregional training on feminist theologising and reading the Bible with a message of exhortation for twenty-three indigenous women participants.

The participants delved into revisiting their stories of discrimination for being a girl/woman, coming from a particular class/caste/racial/ethnic group/nationality/citizenship/religious community. Dr Hope Antone, CCA executive secretary for Faith Mission and Unity, in her interactive input shared the following sayings, often said jokingly by some who say that there is no need for feminism/women's movement in Asia:

- The women's movement only diffuses the more important struggle for social transformation.
- Women are already highly regarded in Asia and some of our countries have produced women presidents.

- Behind the success (or also downfall) of every man is a woman.
- Man is the head but woman is the neck that turns the head around.
- Man is the general of the house while woman is the major—he makes only general decisions while she makes the major decisions.
- The hand that rocks the cradle rules the world.
- Women hold the keys to the drawers and lockers, etc.

But Hope's input and the women's stories and analyses 'prove that such sayings, often said jokingly, are the exception than the rule. They are also deceptive for they do not reflect the reality about the majority of women in Asia,' Hope said.

There is a need for feminism because:

- The majority of Asian women suffer from discrimination, inhumane treatment, harassment, abuse and violence before birth, after birth and during their lifetime.
- These violations of the image of God in women are often reinforced by cultural practices and religious teachings.
- Feminism links gender issues with all other oppressive forces and seeks to participate in the total transformation of society.

The following are the features of Asian feminist theology shared by Hope Antone that the women studied and applied in their articulation exercise towards the end of the training.

- It is contextual:
 - Asian historical, social, economic, political, cultural and religious contexts.
 - Asian context involves the issue of power in relation to gender, race, class, caste and nationality/citizenship.
- It is integrated, combining:
 - analysis of contexts,
 - women’s multiple oppression,
 - reflection on Christian faith,
 - reflection on Asian traditions,
 - committed action.
- It is inclusive:
 - It is concerned not only for women but also for men, youth, children, society, ecology, i.e. the web of life.
 - It makes use of Asian resources in theologising that addresses the total being, e.g. holistic spirituality.
- It is transformational, in quest of just relationships and peace with justice for all:
 - The transformation of androcentric, anthropocentric and life-diminishing attitudes and practices.
 - The transformation of unjust and oppressive structures.

Summarising the discussions, the indigenous women concluded that for Asian women, there is an interlinking of sexism, classism, racism, casteism, religious chauvinism, citizenship/nationality in Third World countries, and many others. We participate in them, consciously or unconsciously. While for the most part women are victims, we also participate in the propagation of the victimisation. We therefore need to be critical of this participation and propagation. Even if we feel that we are unaffected, as long as there are Asian women who are affected there is cause for great concern—for we are all connected. This complex reality challenges us to work together for our total transformation and the transformation of the world we live in. How?

Dr R.L. Hnuni of Northeast India led in the study of a feminist reading of the Bible. She said that ‘feminist hermeneutics means interpretation of biblical texts from the experience of sufferings of marginalisation and oppression of women, hence it cannot take the normative authority of the biblical archetype as a point of departure for interpreting the Bible. It must begin with the experience of women and their struggle for liberation.’



Wuhua of Taiwan leading in a community dance

She led in the feminist reading of the creation story in Genesis 2:18–23, Hagar and Sarah and case studies of Jesus’ attitude towards women—a bent-over woman, a woman with a flow of blood, a woman who anointed Jesus’ feet, a Samaritan woman, a woman caught in adultery. Knowing that many problems and questions on women and their participation in the ministry come from the teachings of St Paul, Hnuni discussed some passages and reinterpreted Paul’s attitude towards women, e.g. 1 Corinthians 11:3: ‘Christ is the head of every man, and the husband is the head of his wife, and God is the head of Christ.’ She said, ‘This is often inter-



Dr Hnuni with Cordillera children

preted to claim man's superiority over woman. If that is the way it is to be interpreted, then God is superior to Christ, which is in contradiction of the doctrine of God, that the triune God cannot have lower or higher person. If Jesus Christ is not lower than God, then here "head" does not mean lower and higher, even between man and woman. Here "head" is to be understood as in terms of relationship. Man and woman's relationship is the same as the Christ-God relationship—they are equally partners together who should work together on equal par with each other. This phrase emphasises harmonious relationship rather than the hierarchical relationship.'

Indigenous women have a big responsibility in protecting God's creation, drawing from the close relationship that indigenous people have with nature. Indigenous folk stories can be used in parallel with the biblical text to enrich our reflections on our reality and inspire us for transformation. Hnuni gave her interpretation of the Mizo folk story of Maurangi as an example of affirming the relation between ecology and women. In this folk story, she said, 'in general there is a close relationship between people and nature for tribal people. They do not look at the world and its inhabitants in the same way scientists do. Science generally looks at things objectively and searches to prove them scientifically. Tribal people regard themselves as part of nature and live in harmony

with nature. The earth is life for them, not only in terms of utility but in the full sense of partnership, friend and mother. They are people whose lives reflect the true meaning of ecology, which may be rendered as a well ordered life in one household. Tribal people enjoy life integrated with nature, in which it is not possible to separate the two. They respect mother earth as God's precious gift to everyone and the source of human life. As such what is deeply embedded in their understanding is that earth and nature are not to be owned personally, used greedily or destroyed as they like.'

The indigenous women did their own articulations of their feminist theologising and reading of the Bible before they did their action plans. Doing a feminist way is not easy because of our steep training on theologising done by Western, white, middle class men who are famous scholars and authors. But it is worth trying. Esther Balawag and Judith Aniceto worked together weaving the stories of the women of Ucab in Cordillera, with their persevering struggles against the raping of their land by mining corporations, and Rizpah, with her persistent day-and-night vigil to protect her sons' exposed dead bodies from the birds and wild animals on the hill of Gibeah (2 Samuel 21:1–14). Powerful stories of the unceasing love of mothers.

Finally, Sharon Rose Joy Ruiz Duremdez, a CCA General Committee member, gave the inspirational participatory message using the metaphor of the garden with the weeds of patriarchy that obstruct the blossoming of women. The participants plucked out some weeds they named as racism, gender inequality, bias against ordination of women and non-recognition of women in the church. The flowerless stems symbolise the invisibility of indigenous women who are not recognised and far from the centre of power and growth. As Sharon named the struggle of indigenous women from invisibility to visibility, the women pasted some flowers on the stems. Bishop Mar Inong and Dr Luna Dingayan, who were guests during the closing service, also pasted flowers in solidarity with the women. To end, Sharon called on some women to stretch a string across the garden to symbolise collective strength, not in isolation but to protect ourselves and each other, protecting the whole community, the whole creation!

'For our struggle is not against enemies of blood and flesh, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.' (Ephesians 6:12)

—Cora Tabing-Reyes



Rev. Elizabeth Enjut sharing Iban dance

Change Agents

Strengthening life skills among young people

In the Asia Pacific region, many children and adolescents living in disadvantaged socioeconomic conditions either drop out of school at an early age or are never even enrolled. It is alarming to note the increasing number of young people who are neither in employment nor in education. A recent report released by ILO reveals that of the 1.1 billion young people aged between 15 and 24 worldwide one out of three is either seeking but unable to find work, has given up the job search entirely or is working but living on less than US\$2 a day.

Disadvantaged youth, especially those living in poverty, struggle for their daily survival. Studies show that the precarious life circumstances of such young people are exacerbated by threats to their physical and mental health, posed by HIV/AIDS, sexual abuse and sexual exploitation. According to UNAIDS reports, young people account for 50 per cent of all new HIV infections worldwide and more than 6,000 catch the virus every day. This is a challenge to God's creation and a challenge to the church, which claims to be involved in God's mission.

In addition, countries in the region experience challenges that include reluctance to acknowledge adolescent sexuality and the societal roots of vulnerability, limited delivery capacity, difficulties linking the development of knowledge, skills, attitudes and life skills to behaviour and a general lack of child- and adolescent-friendly services.

Why Life Skills-Based Education?

In the health field, life skills-based education emerged from recognising that while information and medical interventions continue to be important to maintain and restore health, these measures do not protect people from the harmful effects of their own behaviour and that of others. Therefore life skills were introduced to focus on behaviours and to make the individual not only more aware but also to be equipped with skills to avoid or handle specific situations where people are at risk.

Assessments in the region have also shown that there is a need for processes within countries to develop conceptual clarity and build shared under-

standing of life skills-based education, ensuring a programming framework with a strong behavioural focus. Moreover the prerequisite to create school, family and community environments that support the use of life skills by learners is frequently ignored and needs to be given priority.

In light of the above, there is an urgent requirement for life-skills training to enhance the physical and mental wellbeing of young people living under socially and economically disadvantaged circumstances in the Asia Pacific region. Previous studies have shown that life-skills training not only helps minimise high-risk behaviour but also builds young people's confidence for engaging in creative problem solving to overcome the social and economic barriers to self-development.

Facilitating Change through CCA-UNESCAP Partnership

The CCA-UNESCAP project, 'Strengthening Life Skills for Positive Youth Health Behaviour', aims to empower young people aged 15-24 with essential life skills so that they are better able to protect themselves from the threat of HIV/AIDS and drugs. The four-year (2005-2008) project has been implemented in four countries—Cambodia, Chi-

There is an urgent requirement for life-skills training to enhance the physical and mental wellbeing of young people living under socially and economically disadvantaged circumstances in the Asia Pacific region



Group discussion. What are the qualities of a 'peer educator'?

A sign of hope for the region is the adoption of the multisectoral approach, recognising that HIV/AIDS is a social and economic challenge and not just a health problem



na (in the Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region), the Philippines and Sri Lanka. It is envisaged that disadvantaged youth participating in the project will adopt positive health behaviour and healthy lifestyles.

The planned outputs of this project are that:

- disadvantaged youth will be equipped with life skills to make informed and responsible choices about their health, particularly on HIV/AIDS and substance use,
- a more supportive environment be created to facilitate positive behaviour development among disadvantaged youth,
- evidence on effective community-based interventions on life-skills development for youth will be available as a reference source for policy and program improvement.

In the last year pre-intervention research has been carried out in selected areas in all four countries. The results have shown interesting findings regarding the knowledge, attitude and behaviour of youth in relation to their reproductive health behaviour and substance use. Here we would like to share with you our interventions in one project sites—Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region, China.

Interventions in Xinjiang

The Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region takes up about one-sixth of China's area and shares borders with many countries. The identified locations for project interventions among out-of-school youth in Xinjiang were the periurban areas of two cities, Kashgar and Yining.

Kashgar, situated in the southwest of Xinjiang, is quite different from the rest of China. The city was run by the Soviets until World War II when it came back to Chinese control. Ninety per cent of

the population are practising Muslims. Yining is a city in the western Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region and is located on the Lli River in the Dzungarian basin, bordering Kazakhstan.

HIV/AIDS in Xinjiang

This autonomous region serves as a convenient drug-trafficking route, lying between the opium-growing regions of Afghanistan and Southeast Asia and the heroin markets in Central Asia, Russia and Europe. As an important drug-trafficking route, the HIV prevalence among injecting drug users (IDUs) in the region is remarkably high. According to official estimates it is the most affected province in China in terms of the total number of cases. Evidence now suggests that the epidemic is spreading to the general population. In some parts of Xinjiang, the HIV/AIDS prevalence rate has reached a staggering 89 per cent.

However, a sign of hope for the region is the adoption of the multisectoral approach, recognising that HIV/AIDS is a social and economic challenge and not just a health problem. It is encouraging to note that the government, civil society organisations, religious sectors and other non-governmental organisations are taking an active part in the fight against HIV/AIDS in Xinjiang.

Some of the key findings from the baseline survey undertaken as part of the project interventions during the past year in Kashgar and Yining, Xinjiang are that:

- out of 1,200 youth surveyed (aged 15–25), 87.7 per cent had already left school,
- religious beliefs among young people are strong and religion played an important role in the communities,
- the main influences contributing to smoking were friends, peers and classmates (92.1 per cent in Kashgar, 88.3 per cent in Yining). However family violence was an important factor attributing to smoking, alcohol and substance use,
- misconceptions regarding HIV/AIDS were significant in both Kashgar and Yining. HIV prevention knowledge requires to be strengthened,
- there are fewer opportunities for life skills development in relation to self-protection,
- less than 50 per cent of youth took part in social activities (youth groups, clubs or associations).

The first round of training of trainers (TOT) was initiated on 16–23 September 2006 in two cities—Kashgar and Yining.

The Training of Trainers Program was carried out in both Kashgar and Yining with our network partners, the Xinjiang STI/HIV Prevention and Control, the Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (CDC) and the Department of Health, Xinjiang. The two-day training-of-trainers program brought participants representing the Centre for Disease Prevention and Control—Kashgar and Yining, the youth league of Kashgar, Yining, Yinger and Bayandai, the Yining city office of armed citizens, the government of Xiamalbager and the clinic of Xiamalbager.

The participants came from Han, Kazak and Uygur ethnic groups. The training included presentations, group activities (group discussions, role play, games and exercises) based on the ESCAP Life Skills Training Kit on ‘HIV Prevention among Young People’. In spite of the cultural and religious barriers, the participants were open minded and energetic and actively involved themselves in the discussions and identified specific activities to mobilise vulnerable youth and other stakeholders in the community.

Today’s Youth—Our ‘Change Agents’ for Tomorrow

As we continue with our interventions in all four countries during the next two years, it is our desire to create successful processes in developing policy advocacy and social mobilisation plans to build informed and supportive political, policy and institutional environments for life skills-based education in all four implementing countries.

We seek your prayers in our efforts to strengthen the coordination roles of governments, particularly in their programming for vulnerable youth who are not in school, and the role of parents, religious leaders and community surrounding the life skills-based program, which are key to bringing in changes in the communities. We believe that an approach such as this will stimulate inputs from young people to help identify important factors that are crucial in leading to behavioural change in the lives of these young people and build necessary life skills and knowledge to enable them to handle risky life situations that they may be exposed to and thereby protect them from HIV/AIDS.

Life skills education cannot be done alone. It needs the mobilisation, support and participation of all stakeholders—youth, communities, religious leaders, media, bureaucracy and political leaders.

Let us invest in our young people. Our youth are ‘agents of change’ within their own communities. It is their right to have access to education,

health care and job opportunities to help build their own lives and create a new future for all amidst the struggle.

—Shirley Susan

The life skills kit published by UNESCAP (United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia Pacific), Bangkok, titled ‘HIV Prevention among Young People: Life Skills Training Kit’ is available. Those interested may contact Shirley Susan (shirley@cca.org.hk) for further details.

You may also visit the website for further information on the project—www.unescap.org/esid/hds/projects/lifeskills/index.asp.



Youth identify effective strategies to mobilise out-of-school youth



Training of trainers workshop in Kashgar, Xinjiang

Rerouting Mission and Ecumenism

Escaping the clutches of the Empire

The story of the three Magi provides a metaphor of an alternative route as well as a warning for the ecumenical movement. Herod, representing the empire, tried to coopt the Magi, but instead of following the imperial command, the Magi followed another route—back to their own country.

How can we reroute mission and ecumenism so that it does not get coopted by the empire? This question is behind the CCA-FMU program 'Rerouting Mission and Ecumenism,' which is part of the faith and ideology reflections initiated by the Urban Rural Mission desk of CCA.

The third in a series of subregional consultations, 'Rerouting Mission and Ecumenism in Asia,' was held at Tao Fong Shan in Hong Kong on 8–12 November. This was mainly a Northeast Asian consultation, but included the drafting committee composed of representatives from the earlier consultations in South Asia and Southeast Asia.

The story of the three Magi from the East who went looking for the Christ child after following the star to Bethlehem has provided a metaphor of an alternative route as well as a warning for the ecumenical movement. Herod, representing the empire, tried to coopt the Magi, but instead

of following the imperial command, the Magi, instructed by an angel in a dream, followed another route—back to their own country.

In the history of Christianity, the empire has coopted the church and its mission. Hence, rerouting mission and ecumenism is needed in order to free the church from the clutches of the empire. One way to do this is to read the Bible from the perspective of the voiceless in the text—the unnamed slave (*pais*), the Canaanites, the women.

'Our colonial masters brought to us the Israelite motif in reading the Bible. But we are not Israelites—we are actually the Canaanites. We must read the Bible as Canaanites,' said Revelation Velunta, a Bible scholar who teaches at Union Theological Seminary in Cavite in the Philippines, and who led two Bible studies at the consultation.

The group named today's empire as the United States of America, but also affirmed that the empire has many faces—including other countries that are



Participants at the consultation on Rerouting Mission and Ecumenism in Asia

In order to free mission and ecumenism from the clutches of the empire, there is a need for church and ecumenical bodies to rediscover their own histories and the histories of Eastern churches

aligned with the US or those that try to threaten and colonise other countries or the whole ideology of development that is affecting if not controlling ecumenical organisations.

In dealing with the empire, East and West need to converge for justice and liberation. Those in the belly of the beast and those outside must work together in a new kind of convergence. Convergence requires unity in disarming, dismantling and transforming empire.

In order to free mission and ecumenism from the clutches of the empire, there is a need for church and ecumenical bodies to rediscover their own histories and the histories of Eastern churches (other than the one history promoted by the empire that makes the Western Christianity normative for all).

Since mission has taken an imperial connotation that assumes power and control, e.g. the haves versus the have-nots, and divides or categorises people, e.g. as mission-sending versus mission-receiving, there is a need for new definitions, new words and new stories.

Mission must begin with local communities. It must be defined as friendship of equal subjects. It includes self-emptying, not by some for the sake of others, but by all for the sake of the common life of all living beings. It may take the form of sharing stories of life in pain and struggle. Ecumenism should be taken to mean not only the 'inhabited earth' which tends to be anthropocentric, but also of the whole cosmos. The wider ecumenism has to do with sharing life and struggling together for life in the cosmos. Such notions are also present in the other Asian religions.

The Hong Kong meeting had Dr Tso Man King (Hong Kong), Dr Kim Yong Bock (Korea), Dr M.P. Joseph (India), and Dr Revelation Velunta (Philippines) as resource persons, while Josef Widyatmadja and Hope Antone were present as CCA-FMU staff.

This program was part of the continuing studies initiated by Urban Rural Mission with the aim of articulating theology from the perspective of people in pain and in struggle. It was also done in view of the fiftieth anniversary celebration of CCA in 2007 and the centennial anniversary of the Mission Conference in Edinburgh in 2010. It is hoped that after the series of consultations, a consolidated report will be produced in time for the fiftieth anniversary celebration of CCA in 2007—one that will provide a new understanding on mission and ecumenism.

—Hope Antone and Josef Widyatmadja

Executive Secretary

International Committee of the Fellowship of the Least Coin

The International Committee of the Fellowship of the Least Coin is looking for a full-time executive secretary to assume office with effect from 1 January 2008. The appointment of the executive secretary will be for a period of five years on such terms and conditions as prescribed by the International Committee of the Fellowship of the Least Coin (ICFLC). The secretariat can be based in the home country of the successful candidate.

The Fellowship of the Least Coin is a global prayer movement for justice, peace and reconciliation. The executive secretary is responsible to an international committee with representatives from all regions of the world.

The applicant should be an Asian Christian woman, living in the continent of Asia with experience in the Fellowship of the Least Coin. She should be able to travel and correspond on behalf of the movement and to communicate in English.

Application forms can be obtained from:

Dr Esther Byu
Executive Secretary, ICFLC
c/o Women's Desk
Church of Christ in Thailand
328 Phaya Thai Road, Ratchathewi,
Bangkok 10400
Thailand
email: icflc@loxinfo.co.th

All applications duly filled in must reach Ms Jill King, Chairperson of the Search Committee, by 30 April 2007 at the following address:
Ms Jill King
Chairperson, ICFLC
10 Rossendale Close, Walton
Chesterfield, Derbyshire
S40 3EL, England, UK
email: paul.king7@virgin.net

Women Networking

Asian Church Women's Conference and the Fellowship of the Least Coin meet in Malaysia

The Asian Church Women's Conference and the Fellowship of the Least Coin, historically intertwined, joined in the fiftieth anniversary celebration of the FLC, a global prayer movement on justice, peace and celebration, which was born in Asia. Shanti Solomon of India envisioned it while she was in the Philippines during a Pacific peace team visit to countries affected by the war. It was in partnership with Margaret Shannon and Dorothy Wagner of the Presbyterian Women of the Presbyterian Church USA in 1956 that FLC was launched, with each woman participating in a prayer movement and offering a token of a least coin. Its beginnings were also intertwined with CCA's history.

The Asian Church Women's Conference 13th Quadrennial General Assembly held on 8–17 October was attended by more than 300 delegates and guests. The big event was hosted by the Council of Churches in Malaysia.

The jubilee theme is 'Celebrating the Legacy, Visioning the Future, Living the Jubilee'. Battu Jambawai of Africa, incumbent chairperson of the International Committee of the Fellowship of the Least Coin, moderated the launching of this celebration on 9 October through a panel presentation of Shirin Samuel from Pakistan, Valamotu Palu from the Pacific and Catreli Hunter from the USA dealing on each aspect of the theme. The book *Fellowship of the Least Coin at Fifty* was also launched.

International
Committee for the
Fellowship of the
Least Coin

The daily Bible studies were led by Gloria Santos of the Philippines, one of the mothers of ACWC, Monica Melancthon of Gurukul Theological Seminary in India and Yong Ting Jin, Coordinator of Asian Women's Resource Centre, based in Malaysia. Inspired by the biblical reflections, the women had group sharing sessions on HIV/AIDS, multicultural faith, natural disasters, violence and trafficking in women, and the empowerment of youth and young adult women for action. Aruna Gnanadason then exhorted them to seize the moment for transformation.

The celebration culminated in a meaningful thanksgiving service and a celebration banquet, which was enjoyed by everyone.

The new leadership of ACWC comprises Nareeboon Rachkeeree (Thailand, president), Pauline Yates (Aoteroa New Zealand, vice president), Donna Bryan (Australia, secretary), Wong Wai Yin Christina (Hong Kong, treasurer) and Gloria Sarkar (Bangladesh), Rosmalia Barus (Indonesia) and Lin Niling (Taiwan) (executive committee). Chiang Shu-wen was reappointed as executive secretary.

Once more, in faith, the International Committee for the Fellowship of the Least Coin, in its 26th Annual Meeting following the ACWC General Assembly, budgeted and allocated the amount of US\$339,600 for block grants for eleven regional and global organisations, grants for twenty-four projects from different regions, the emergency fund, the Circle of Prayer and administration expenses.

The new officers are Gillian King of the Ecumenical Forum of European Christian Women (chairperson) and Esther Kilaghbian of the Middle East Council of Churches (vice chairperson). Joanne Instance of Canada continues as honorary treasurer and the executive secretary is Esther Byu. Having amended its constitution, the ICFLC is starting a search process for a new executive secretary, who will commence work in January 2008.

—Cora Tabing-Reyes



What Do Religions Have in Common?

Sharing in the theological formation of ecumenical partners

One usual answer to the question above is that all religions share a vision of peace and harmony for its adherents. Asked in the context of a critical assessment of religions in relation to women's situation, however, the question raises another set of answers. All major religions are patriarchal, springing from patriarchal contexts, founded by, taught and interpreted by men, and hold very oppressive teachings for women. In Asia, the oppression of women is deeply rooted in the patriarchal cultures and religions of Asia.

This was part of the workshop exercise Hope Antone did with the participants of the Student Empowerment for Transformation program of the World Student Christian Federation Asia-Pacific Region on 18 November at the Student Christian Centre in Bangkok, Thailand. Although SET fo-

cused on the theme, 'Interfaith and Education,' one day was devoted to sessions on women and religion—which is part of WSCF AP's strategy of mainstreaming gender issues throughout their programs.

Hope shared some teachings in the scriptures and traditions of six major religions that were born in Asia (Hinduism, Buddhism, Confucianism, Judaism, Christianity and Islam) that have been used to inscribe or justify the oppression of women.

Asian Christian feminists however affirm that even though all religions contain and propagate teachings that are oppressive to women because of the patriarchal contexts in which they emerged, the same religions have liberating elements that can be harnessed to critique oppression and bring about liberation. "Thus, it is our responsibility as

In Asia, the oppression of women is deeply rooted in the patriarchal cultures and religions of Asia



Participants of the Student Empowerment for Transformation



'It is our responsibility as people of faith to critique what is oppressive and lift up what is liberating in all our religions'

Hope Antone with Jean Grace Tanilong (from SCM Philippines) and Necta Montes Rocas (Regional Secretary of WSCF Asia Pacific)



people of faith to critique what is oppressive and lift up what is liberating in all our religions.'

Since it is not right for adherents of another religion to critique the teachings and traditions of a particular religion, the interfaith approach to education would be a valuable tool for awareness and consciousness raising that could hopefully lead to acts of transformation within and among different religious communities.

First, an interfaith approach to education is appropriate for us in Asia, since our region is the birthplace (cradle) and home of all the living religions of the world. We can no longer pretend to live in isolation from one another. In reality we cannot help but interact with each other. We must recover our Asian heritage of being able to live together despite our differences (plurality) in race/ethnicity, language, culture and religion, ideology etc.

Second, an interfaith approach to education is very important in order to foster better understanding of one another's faith even as we try to deepen our understanding of our own. Understanding is badly needed today especially in our age when religions are seemingly portrayed more as advocates or promoters of violence instead of peace. By trying to understand the other's faith one will also deepen one's own faith. A good understanding of each other's faith will help us deal with some of our problems—including gender injustice—because whether we like it or not, these religions and cultures have shaped our worldview and our perception of ourselves—for good or bad.

Third, an interfaith approach to education will also enable the different faiths to learn from one another. In May 2004, CCA coorganised as part of the Inter-Religious Cooperation Program a consultation on Gender Justice and Genuine Partnership of Men and Women in a Buddhist ashram outside Bangkok. We who came from the Christian communities shared our usual way of critically reading the Bible with our Asian feminist eyes, making a critique of what is oppressive in the text and highlighting what is liberating. Two young Muslim sisters from Indonesia said, 'So that is how you read your Bible. We cannot even read the Holy Koran because the Arabic we know is just enough for saying our prayers. We must study more so we can read and interpret the Holy Koran by ourselves.'

Fourth, an interfaith approach to education will foster more cooperation through joint programs and advocacy as we address common problems that face us in the region. Issues such as empire and globalisation, oppression of women and children, terrorism and fundamentalism, poverty and injustice continue to be glaring issues here in Asia, which all religions must tackle together. We Christians in Asia are a tiny minority—we cannot do much if we try to solve any of these problems. We have to work together with our sisters and brothers of other faiths.

Earlier, on 6–8 November, Hope was able to lead a series of Bible studies on women and gender justice for the regional training of trainers of the Asia Pacific Alliance of YMCAs held at the YMCA International House in Chiang Mai, Thailand, on the theme, 'Towards Gender Responsiveness and a Gender-just Society'.

CCA maintains a healthy partnership with APAYMCA and WSCF AP as ecumenical partners in Asia through such sharing and involvement in their theological formation.

—Hope S. Antone

An Experience

On 21 August I went to the airport at 5 in the morning and after two hours of lining up to check-in, stopovers at Hong Kong and Amsterdam, and fifteen-and-a-half hours of flying I arrived at Geneva International Airport. I was going to attend the World Council of Churches Stewardship Program for the 2006 Central Committee Meeting. The stewardship program is one of the many ways that foster ecumenical formation, learning and leadership training for youth.

Twenty-six young people from all over the world were brought together with the hope to start a community of faith with concern and respect, learn with and from each other and work together as a team during the Central Committee Meeting. The very first people I met were Lukasz, a legend in the WCC stewardship program, a tall, blonde Dane that arrived around the same time as I did, an English woman talking to somebody on her mobile phone (probably her parents) and a European-looking, South American red-headed Brazilian. You could just imagine the variety of culture, race and values represented. And yes, we all became very good friends.

Nineteen days of intense fun, hard work and learning were about to begin.

The program started with opening worship led by Natalie Maxson, WCC program executive for youth/young adults. Then in the coming days a series of lectures about the different programs and issues the WCC was working on, such as interreligious dialogues, racism and HIV/AIDS to name a few. The topics were very exciting and interesting and never failed to have faith as the primary basis for such action. After all the inputs it was time to work as a team and help out in the meeting—from doing errands in the plenary hall, to reproducing documents, to distributing press releases to assisting the language services and documentation.

A Challenge

The stewards' program wasn't exempted from tough situations. Tolerance was essential. Good health was necessary. An open heart and mind was needed when presented with studies and opinions new to your perspective. Language was also an annoying barrier to clear expression and explanation but easily mellowed with the mutual effort each one gave to meet half way, plus there was music which is the language of the soul. It was a challenge to set aside differences with our youthful spirit and passion to come to learn and serve together all in love for God and the whole creation. This is how

Stewardship

An experience, a challenge, a life ...

I personally feel it should be for all of us on this journey. For me it was a time of discovery. A time to let go of my personal prejudices, let God reveal God's unlimited ways, and appreciate the people I was with and the context they brought with them.

I bring with me the cry and unrest of the victims of extrajudicial killings in my country. The figures are unbelievable. It makes you wonder where sensibility went and why people are so numb to these goosebump-giving acts. Since the beginning of the present government administration there have been more or less 750 killings and the numbers grow with each day. On 3 October, former Philippine Independent Church Prime Bishop, Bishop Alberto Ramento, was stabbed (seven times) to death inside the Philippine Independent Church Cathedral (his church) at Tarlac, Philippines. The military is once again believed to be responsible for this inhumane act on a respected man of God. Imagine your very own pastor, minister or bishop in the same situation. What terror! All this because of a passion for service and a heart for the poor and oppressed. I fervently ask for your prayers and solidarity to 'Stop the Killings' in the Philippines.

A Life

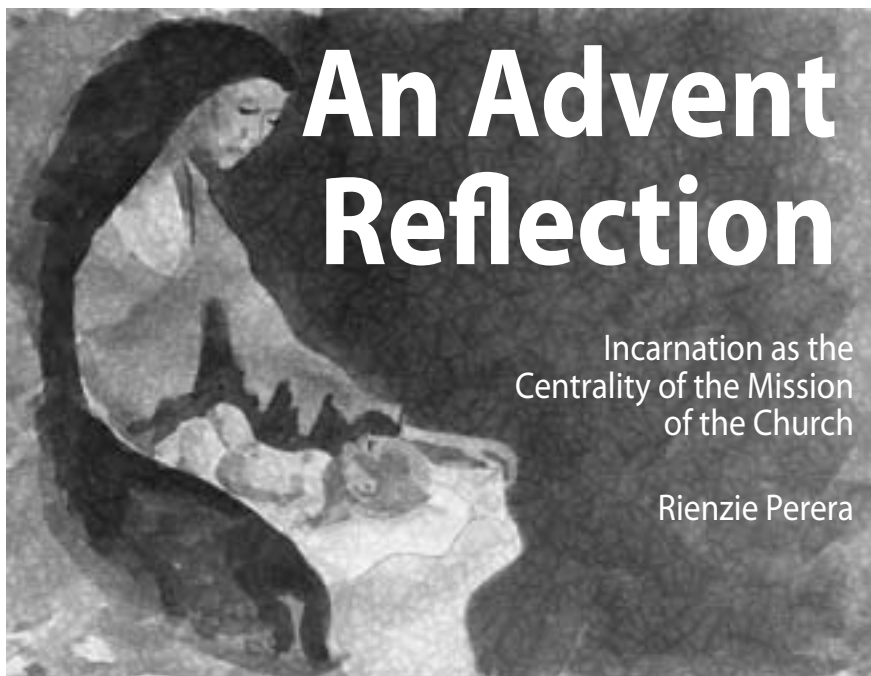
God called us to be STICKS—spiritually transformed, inspired, concerned and kindled stewards. Stewardship isn't just a job description or a title. Stewardship is a lifestyle. Wherever we are situated, we must be good, accountable and responsible caretakers of the things entrusted to us. After all, the things we do now will have effects on the things to come. So take time always to reflect, think of the goodness this world was intended for and what you are doing to preserve it, and think of your children and the world they will grow up in, and think of our role as people of faith. Then live it—with prayer and perspiration!

To the youth, keep bubbling with dreams! 'Don't let them look down on you because you are young, but set an example in speech, in life, in love, in faith and in purity.' (1 Timothy 4:12) But also observe respect to elders for they have wisdom and experience that we do not have.

Jec Dan Borlado



Jec Dan Borlado is from the Western Visayas Ecumenical Youth Federation in Iloilo City in the Philippines



An Advent Reflection

Incarnation as the
Centrality of the Mission
of the Church

Rienzie Perera

This issue of the *CCA News* will reach you during the season of Advent or at Christmas. In this article I want to reflect on the meaning of Advent in order to invite the church/Christians to rediscover the centrality of God's mission. Advent is the liturgical season set apart by the church as a time of preparation or soul searching before we celebrate the birth of Jesus the Christ. Advent is the season of waiting in hope and a time to reflect on Jesus the Christ who came (past), who comes (present) and who will come again (future). In order for the church to be in mission in any given context it has to reflect on the ministry enacted by Jesus and recorded in the Gospels. Reflection on the gospel narratives gives us the inspiration to re-enact or imitate the life and ministry of Jesus the Christ in contemporary history and to prepare ourselves to take risks and dare into the unknown future under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, if the church were to be in mission it must re-discover its lost vision and Advent is the best time for it.

God's Mission

The central thrust of God's mission is life giving. This we see in the creation narratives recorded in the first two chapters of the book of Genesis. According to Genesis 1:1 God opens God's channel of communication with the world through the act of creation. This communication is implied when the writer of the book of Genesis says, 'In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.'

The second verse in the same chapter narrates almost a kind of death or disorder when it says, 'The earth was without form and void, and the darkness was upon the face of the deep.' It is to this formless and chaotic situation God brings order, life and light and makes sure that there is life in the world. (Read Genesis 1:11 and 22 and see also Ezekiel 37.) This life-giving mission comes to its climax when God created humankind in God's own image (Genesis 1:27). This is the first creative divine mission we encounter in the Bible and it does not end in itself. God entrusts the same mission of creation to those whom God created in God's own image and likeness. The work of creation or life-giving mission has to continue. This concept of continuing creation as life-giving mission is

forcefully brought out by the command God gives to Noah in Genesis 6:19–21. Noah has to preserve every living being.

God's mission of life giving cannot and should not be separated from God's mission of redemption. The nature of Yahweh is not to be transcendent/detached from the creation but to be immersed within it and to experience both pain and joy, life and death, frustration and deliberation, enslavement and liberation. God's involvement in creation and the concern for the created is brought out in the following passage: "Then the Lord said, "I have seen the affliction of my people who are in Egypt, and have heard their cry because of their task masters; I know their sufferings, and I have come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land to a good and broad land." (Exodus 3:7–8)

In the creation story we see God involved in the mission of creation but in the Exodus narrative we see God involved in the mission of re-creation or transformation of the broken, the bruised and the bleeding. In the context of the Exodus, especially the passage mentioned above, we see God involved in an act to restore the dignity of a people who have ceased to be human and lost their true identity as a people.

Just as God entrusted God's mission of creation and preservation to humans created in God's own image (Adam, Eve and Noah), the mission of salvation is also entrusted to humans such as Moses and the line of prophets that came after him. Therefore,

it is important to stress that protection of life and liberation from slavery, in whatever form it may exist, is the centrality of God's mission. That is the mission Jesus enacted during his lifetime and the church is mandated to embody and imitate it.

The Mission of the Incarnated One

I believe Christmas is also an opportune moment to reflect on the birth of Jesus the Christ. Often it is a surprise to some of us to see the way we have confined Jesus to his cradle and to glorify him to be merely a gentle Jesus meek and mild. In this age of globalisation the cutting edge of the Christmas story is not merely blunted but domesticated and commercialised to make money by the market-driven world. Therefore, those of us who are enlightened by the Gospel narratives have a task to redeem the distorted and perverted image of Jesus the Christ who has become popular among Christians. We have the task to liberate this distorted image of Jesus even before we sing such Christmas carols as 'Joy to the world the Lord is come' and to proclaim to the world that Jesus the Christ came to this world to liberate humankind, especially the 'sinned against' and those denied of life and life-giving resources that are in plenty in God's creation but enjoyed only by a small minority because of their power and greed and the desire to accumulate.

It is important to remember that creation and redemption are the most fundamental aspects of the mission of God and everything else, including the mission of Jesus, must be anchored on them. Whenever or wherever the creation or creatures are threatened God intervenes to redeem them. It is God's intention that the entire creation will grow in freedom till it reaches its fullness. Paul draws our attention to this truth when he says, 'The creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labour pains until now; and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies.' (Romans 8:21-23)

It is to achieve this mission that Jesus, the Word become flesh, who is full of life and through whom all things came into being (John 1:3-4) enters this world and carries out life-saving, life-affirming and life-giving mission. Having been sent by God (John 20:21), he sets people free from everything that dehumanises them and restores their dignity as the children of God and promises them life in

abundance (John 3:15-16 and 10:10). According to 1 John 4: 9 God sent God's only son into the world so that we might live through him. In fact, for John, the purpose of writing the gospel was to indicate that to have faith in Jesus the Christ is to gain life (John 20:31). John uses several phrases and images, such as the bread of life (6:35, 38) and living water (7:37-39) to affirm the truth that Jesus came to the world to give life and fight against principalities and powers that deny life. In order to emphasise the centrality of this message Jesus also says God's will is that no-one or nothing is lost and that everyone and everything should get life (John 6:39-40). What is life, or eternal life for John, is the same as in the synoptic Gospels when they use the term 'kingdom of God'. In other words to talk about the kingdom of God or the reign of God is to talk about life.

According to Mark, after announcing the good news about the kingdom of God in 1:15, Jesus calls some persons to be his disciples and then until 2:13 he goes on liberating people from everything that dehumanises them—all types of sickness and demoniacs. The Nazareth Manifesto of Jesus explicates the mission of Jesus further.

The Mission of the Church

Based on this understanding and reading of the Gospels in this holistic manner, can mission be anything other than the mission of God or Jesus, which promoted life, healing and reconciliation? It is unfortunate that many churches have deviated from this central thrust of mission and are engaged in mission devoid of the centrality of the Jesus the Christ crucified. Therefore it is important to use this season of Advent for critical reflection, repentance (*metanoia*) and renewal. It is important that Christians and the churches scattered throughout Asia work towards their own liberation by liberating Jesus the Christ enslaved into all forms of false dogma, popular piety, rituals and devotion that are far removed from the Jesus of the Gospels. This by no means an easy task and there will be plenty of resistance to it from within the churches themselves. However, to be involved in God's mission we, the members of the church, must have the courage to speak the truth in love and also to live the truth.

The Word that became flesh in a given time in history becomes flesh in and through us when we imitate the Jesus of the Gospels in contemporary life.

Rev. Dr Rienzie Perera is CCA's new Associate General Secretary for Finance and Relations

Women, Ambassadors with and for Children

Cora Tabing-Reyes

When I went home recently to the Philippines, without being asked my four-year-old grandson, whom we endearingly call Balong, sang to me a song, with matching action:

Love of Jesus sweet and marvellous, (3x)

Oh, oh, wonderful love!

Higher than the mountain,

Deeper than the ocean,

Wider than the universe,

Oh, oh, wonderful love!

I was very much touched by his song. Who would not be? Not only did he spontaneously make his grandma relax from her long trip, he also reminded me of Jesus' relationship to children and poses a great challenge.

First, he reminds me how Jesus loved children. They are members of the community—a community that needs teaching, needs healing, needs feeding, needs participation, needs freedom and life. The children were brought to Jesus by people who were scolded by his disciples, but Jesus laid his hands on them. He said, 'Let the little children come to me, and do not stop them, for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs. Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it.' (Luke 18:15–17) In the gospel story of feeding the multitude, Matthew, Mark and Luke recorded that there were five loaves of barley bread and two fish. In John it is recorded that a boy brought them to Jesus. Children participate and contribute to the making of a sharing community. They are partners with adults and they deserve to be acknowledged and recorded.

Secondly, my grandson's song is a big challenge, a big challenge to adults, coming direct from the mouth of a child. He represents the many children who are now in crisis and are challenging women and men to help them feel that 'wonderful love'.

Children at Risk Today

This is a time when our children are in difficult situations and are at high risk. According to the UNICEF statistics:

- every year almost 10.5 million children die before their fifth birthday. That's 30,000 children a day. Most of these children live in developing countries and die from a disease or a combination of diseases that could be prevented or treated if the means were there. Sometimes the cause of death is as simple as a lack of antibiotics for treating pneumonia or oral rehydration salts for diarrhoea. Malnutrition contributes to over half these deaths. Child mortality is closely linked to poverty: advances in infant and child survival have come more slowly in poor countries and to the poorest people in wealthier countries. Improvements in public health services are key, including safe water and better sanitation. Education, especially for girls and mothers, will save children's lives. Raising incomes can help, but little will be achieved unless a greater effort is made to ensure that services reach those who need them most. See www.childinfo.org/areas/childlabour,
- over 50 million children under five years of age are not registered. Around 24 million of them live in South Asia. See www.childinfo.org/areas/birthregistration,
- during the last decade, new problems driven by environmental concerns and socio-economic aspects have emerged. Expanding agriculture and manufacturing business not only increasingly use water but also contribute to pollution of valuable sources of surface and groundwater. Thus overextraction of water has led to a reduced watertables in parts of the world. Problems of contamination of water supplies with naturally occurring inorganic arsenic, in particular in Bangladesh and other parts of South Asia, or fluoride in a number of countries, including China and India, have affected the safety of water supplies. See www.childinfo.org/areas/water.

These are just some of the data that picture a bleak life of children in broken communities and

amidst environmental destruction. When we watch the news, we see the pained faces of children who bear the brunt of ethnic wars, or religious conflicts, or bomb explosions, or flood disasters, or droughts or violence in the home. We are challenged by their faces of fear, faces of hunger, faces of death. What is their song? Do we listen? Where is God in our children's sufferings? What inspiration from the Bible do we get for our response as ambassadors to build community of peace, remembering that God came to us as a child?

The story of the birth of Moses (see Exodus 1:8 – 2:10) tells us what happens to children in situations:

- where hearts are closed for the cause of the weak,
- where a ruler is greedy for power to control,
- where the strong dominate the weak,
- where one race dominates another,
- where increasing numbers of migrants are seen as a threat,
- where the rich dominate the poor,
- where labourers are treated as slaves,
- where there is gender discrimination (this time against boys),
- where structures and buildings are given more importance than poor people's needs.

A closed heart is a hardened heart. It dominates and controls. It desires for power that only serves itself and does not listen to the voice of the weak. It uses violence. Forms of violence can be physical, psychological, economic, sexual, cultural.

The cruel king ordered the Egyptians to make the lives of the Israelites miserable. He told them to 'crush their spirits with hard labour'. Like the ruler, the Egyptians who followed him had no mercy. Not satisfied, the king ordered the midwives, Shiprah and Puah, to kill Hebrew babies if they were boys, but to keep girls alive.

The dominating heart shows no respect for others' lives and treats them as objects that can be dispensed with.

We think of the many children, this time girls, who suffer because of many closed hearts who discriminate against them.

These girls do not see the light of day because they are considered a burden to a society that culturally favours boys.



On the other hand, there is hope for and with our children where hearts are open. Let us reflect now on each of the women and the girl in the Exodus passage who, each in her particular way, served as an ambassador of goodwill. What were in their hearts?

Puah and Shiprah

Puah and Shiprah were midwives who feared God more than they feared the Pharaoh. Their hearts were filled with three C's, all in favour of children:

- courage, to protect life and disobey orders of death,
- commitment, to their vocation to affirm and give life as an expression of their fear of God,
- creative wisdom, to explain to the Pharaoh why the Hebrew boys were born alive: because Hebrew women were 'vigorous and give birth before the midwife comes to them'. (Exodus 1:19)

The Mother

The mother's name was Jochebed. (Exodus 6:20) Her motherly heart was:

- resolute and creative in looking for ways to keep her son alive. She hid him for three months. Then when she could no longer hide him, she prepared a sealed basket and put Moses in it and put it in the bank of the Nile for her daughter to watch over,

- trusting in the ability of Miriam to watch over her brother. She trusted Miriam as her partner. Children have also their resourcefulness that can contribute to creating a community of peace.

Miriam

Miriam, Moses young sister, was just like any other caring sister in the village where I grew up, where family solidarity is valued. Miriam had:

- love for her brother, which made her willing to risk her life and give up her childhood days of playing for his sake,
- a sense of responsibility for the safety of her brother as she watched over the hidden basket,
- a voice and ability to plan and organise. When the princess saw the Hebrew boy, Miriam asked her, 'Shall I go and call a Hebrew woman to act as a wet-nurse?' Even as a young girl she was already developing the leadership abilities that would be useful in the Hebrews' forthcoming exodus from slavery.

The Egyptian Princess

The Egyptian princess's name is not recorded in scripture, yet her open heart had:

- pity for the crying baby boy and solidarity with the oppressed Hebrews. She had overcome the barriers of racial difference and social standing in order to respond to a child's need,
- willingness to listen to Miriam's resourcefulness, allowing her to participate in this transformation for life. She had overcome the age difference in listening to what a young girl offered for the care of the baby,
- courage to decide, act and challenge the power of her father, the Pharaoh, with the power of her caring heart.

Not only women can have open hearts. Men can also have open hearts. And not only men have closed hearts. Women can also be violent to children. Studies prove that victims of child abuse often become abusive when they grow old.

Both women and men have to be challenged and helped to give up the sense of power that controls and exploits, to repent and take up the power of the love of Jesus Christ that enables children to be members of community.

The situation of children at great risk today challenges us, women of the church and disciples of Jesus Christ, to open our hearts to children

as members of our community. There can be no peace without them as participants.

Our biblical heritage shares with us stories that change us, our relationships and our structures, finding God at work with those whose hearts are open for the weak, marginalised and oppressed. And this is irrespective of any differences or barriers that set us apart.

Furthermore, the plight of our children calls us to work with those within our faith, or/and with those of other faith or no faith, with NGOs and civil societies.

As well as scripture, the 1989 Convention of the Rights of the Child and the 2003 UN General Assembly document, 'A World Fit for Children', call nations and all people to respect the dignity of children and to work hard to secure the wellbeing of children as members of the community at home, in the church and in our society, with them as partners. The following principles are offered for us:

- Put children first.
- Eradicate poverty: invest in children
- Leave no child behind.
- Care for every child.
- Educate every child.
- Protect children from harm and exploitation.
- Protect children from war.
- Combat HIV/AIDS.
- Listen to children and ensure their participation.
- Protect the earth for children.

Reflection

- Reflect on an experience of a 'closed heart' in your home, or church or community in relation to children. What cultural belief or attitude reinforces this 'closed heart' towards children?
- Reflect on an experience of opening a heart towards children. What actions were done? What changes took place?
- What does it mean for you to be an ambassador with and for children?

This reflection was given at the All India Council of Christian Women General Assembly held 10-13 November 2006 at Puri, Orissa, India.

Huh Chun Jung

Rev. Huh Chun Jung has been a consultant with the Mekong Ecumenical Partnership Program (MEPP) of CCA since January 2006. Rev. Chun Jung graduated from the Graduate School of the Presbyterian Theological Seminary, Seoul, in 1984. He was also a student at the Bossey Ecumenical Institute of the Graduate School of Geneva University.

Rev. Chun Jung served as general secretary of Youth National Federation of the Presbyterian Church of Korea from 1984 to 1986. He was also the general secretary of Korea Christian Cooperation on Social Development (KCCSD) from 1993 to 2003. After completing his studies, Rev. Chun Jung became a Presbyterian minister in 1987. He was the senior pastor and founder of Ansan Sungbit Church from 1986 to 2005.



New leaders for CCT

The 29th General Assembly of the Church of Christ in Thailand (CCT) was held 16–20 October 2006 at its headquarters in Bangkok. Around 500 voting delegates, observers, stewards and ecumenical delegates met to give thanks to God for his blessings, love and mercy over the ministries of the CCT. The assembly was also a time for setting up new policy for the next quadrennial.

The assembly elected new officers, central committee members and executive committee members. The newly elected officers are Rev. Virat Koydul (moderator), Dr. Banjong Choopowong, (vice-moderator). Mr Sayam Muangsak (general secretary) and Mr Chusak Opasirattisai (treasurer).

Indian Women

The All India Council of Christian Women held its 9th Quadrennial Assembly on 10–13 November 2006 at Puri, Orissa, on the theme, 'Women Ambassadors of Transformation: Potential and Challenges.' One hundred and seventy women from twenty-nine member churches and partners, with some youth and some men, gathered to once more affirm the AICCW vision.

India is fast emerging as an economic power, but there continue the realities of the feminisation of poverty, especially among Dalits, Adivasis and tribals, anti-women/girlchild attitudes, the destruction of environment and the threat of HIV/AIDS. Amidst the opportunity and challenges, the AICCW:

- envisions to unite in prayer, service and witness re-affirming and discovering each other's strengths and potentials to build inclusive communities of Shanti,
- champions alternative leadership and inclusive mission paradigms for sustainable development,
- provides a forum for the united expression of opinion of Christian women on different issues—religious, civil, political, economic and social—empowering them to participate in the decision-making process of church and society,
- educates people to promote gender justice and deconstruct patriarchal ideologies and theology to combat violence against women, children, vulnerable communities and Mother Dharti (Earth),
- facilitates the networking among women of different faith communities to wage peace.

The new officers, with Sabitha Swaraj of the Methodist Church in India as president, pledged to lead in the work of ecumenical women as ambassadors for transformation in the ensuing years.

ECOT Vacancy

The Ecumenical Coalition on Tourism (ECOT) invites applications for the position of director.

The headquarters of ECOT is in Chiang Mai, Thailand, and the successful applicant will be required to live in this city.

Further information is available from the Ecumenical Coalition on Tourism, 9/1 Rattanakosin Road, Tambol Watget, Muang, Chiang Mai 50000, Thailand (email: ecot@ecotonline.org).

Applications close on 31 December 2006.

A Prayer for Open Hearts

God, our Creator,

like a Mother, you nurture children
and have open hearts for the little ones;
like a Father, you embrace them for their
protection,
play with them and find joy.

In Jesus, you have shown unconditional love
and compassion.

Forgive us for the neglect of our children
today,
for our violent ways and thoughts which
scar them,
for allowing structural violence in our
world to go on,
for our apathy and lack of faith in what
you can do through us to bring about
change.

Through the Holy Spirit transform us.

Fill us with your love and righteousness
as we pray and work for fullness of life,
for all of humanity and your creation,
with women, and men and children of all
lands,
with people of different faiths, no
declared faiths and civil societies
as partners in building communities of
peace for all.

Yes, with children in our open hearts.

So help us, God.

In Christ's name. Amen.

—Cora Tabing-Reyes

