

cca news



Make Us Healers, O God!

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Make us healers, O God!



It was heartening to visit Duma village in Halmahera, Indonesia during the General Committee meeting of the Communion of Churches in Indonesia (PGI) in early February this year. This village is historically significant to the Protestant Church in Halmahera, a member of CCA, as Christianity in this island started in this place in the 19th century.

The village was literally demolished when it was attacked by a Muslim fundamentalist group during Christmas in 1999. The conflict further escalated in the following years. Many people lost homes and loved ones. Efforts were made to reconcile the warring groups. People rebuilt their houses and accepted one another. Learning from this painful experience the people united and boldly declared: “no more war.”

In another village, women from both warring groups who everyday sat together selling vegetables and fruits in the market finally took a bold step. Unable anymore to live separately from each other, they initiated a symbolic action of repentance, forgiveness and acceptance. When the church was rebuilt, the Muslims offered a bell in kneeling posture. Similarly, when the mosque was rebuilt, the Christians brought a tifa, a traditional gong, also in the same manner.

Indeed, as we are healed by the divine power of love, we are enabled to be healers to many who are wounded and in despair. This is the core message of God’s self-giving life in Jesus Christ that we celebrate during the passion weeks leading towards Easter:

“All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us. So

we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us; we entreat you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. (2 Corinthians 5:18-20, NRSV)

Violence escalates in many places all over the world, and the impact of quakes in Aotearoa New Zealand, Myanmar and Indonesia, tsunami in Japan, floods in Thailand and other calamities is unbearable. Amidst all these the churches in Asia are called to be healers and reconcilers together with people of all faiths and backgrounds who share the same commitment.

The CCA General Committee at its meeting in Chiang Mai, Thailand, on March 7 - 9, 2011, issued a public statement on the Korean Peninsula urging the President of South Korea to hold peace talks with North Korea, and to encourage the government of South Korea to resume sending humanitarian aid to North Korea.

A letter was also sent to the President of Pakistan to pursue justice for victims of killings falsely accused of the desecration of the Holy Qur’an, and for more control on the misuse of the Blasphemy Law.

This is our prophetic task - to speak out as many lives and God’s entire creation are under threat. The International Ecumenical Peace Convocation of the World Council of Churches marking the end of the Decade to Overcome Violence (DOV) in Jamaica in May 2011 is a timely reminder of our challenging task to continuously strive to overcome violence and build the culture of peace.

May our prayers be heard. With you, O God, make us healers!

Henriette Hutabarat Lebang

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An audacious woman

Jesus left that place and went away to the district of Tyre and Sidon. Just then a Canaanite woman from that region came out and started shouting, 'Have mercy on me, Lord, Son of David; my daughter is tormented by a demon.' But he did not answer her at all. And his disciples came and urged him, saying, 'Send her away, for she keeps shouting after us.' He answered, 'I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.' But she came and knelt before him, saying, 'Lord, help me.' He answered, 'It is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs.' She said, 'Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table.' Then Jesus answered her, 'Woman, great is your faith! Let it be done for you as you wish.' And her daughter was healed instantly. (Matthew 15:21-28, NRSV)

Each time I read this story of Jesus offering healing to a young woman, "tormented by a demon," I am amazed - not just because of Jesus' ability to heal, but because of the mother's courage, passion, quick wit and determination in the face of overwhelming odds. The healing of her daughter is through her faith and her advocacy for her daughter.

This "woman from the region of Tyre and Sidon, who is a Canaanite" is a most unlikely person for Jesus to pay attention to; she is the wrong race - a Syrophonecian not an Israelite, the wrong religion - Canaanite, not Jewish, and the wrong gender - a woman, not a man. We hear Jesus' own words: in the Jewish idiom of the time, she is one of the "dogs" - and a bitch at that.

So we should not be surprised that the disciples tried hard to rid of this uncomfortable and noisy nuisance.

But the woman is persistent. She respectfully recognizes Jesus for who he is, calling him "Lord" and the "Son of David," but when he puts her in her place as outside the house of Israel and outside his favor, she quick-wittedly challenges him, using his own image of food being thrown to the dogs and his claim to fairness. Is there a touch of humor in this debate? And who wins the debate, anyway?

The strength of Jesus here, to me, is that when he is confronted with a new reality, in this case the reality of an outsider

laying claim to his healing power, he has the compassion, justice and integrity to be able to enlarge his understanding of his own call. In the light of the debate with the woman, he appears to recognize that he is also - in the tradition of Isaiah and the prophets, called to minister to Gentiles, to women, to the marginalized and the oppressed.

The outcome of this interaction between Jesus and the woman is healing; that much is certain. We hear in verse 28 that the demon leaves the daughter of the audacious woman, at that moment. But is a "cure" all there is to healing?

Perhaps there is a greater model of healing presented; a healing of the community, of identity and relationships. The Canaanite woman is an advocate for her daughter who is oppressed and marginalized, because not only is she the wrong race, gender and religion but also because she is labeled as "demon possessed". This audacious woman has insisted that God's amazing love cannot be limited to those of the "right" cultural and religious identity. With Jesus on her side, she and her daughter have been restored to a place in the community with respect and dignity.

Is this not greater healing?

This story is echoed today in the stories of audacious women and men who advocate at local and international levels, in local villages and in the United Nations. They call for justice and compassion in the face of the demons of

armed conflict, torture, rape, epidemics, famine and hunger. This Syrophonecian woman is their model of a powerless person whose courage, determination and passion led her to engage in debate and make a difference, to bring healing to the most vulnerable. Like Jesus the Christ, whose powerlessness on the Cross brings about healing for us all, these men and women are wounded healers.

But there is another healing side to this story; let us not forget that it is a woman's story. The healing for the woman herself (apart from that of her daughter) is to be given respect and dignity in the presence of this powerful man, to be listened to and engaged with so that her point of view can make a salutary difference. She is commended by Jesus for her faith - she will be standing tall among the disciples and followers of Jesus.

This story shows us clearly that deep healing takes place within the context of relationships; in this instance, between the woman and Jesus. Again we notice the difference between a cure (of the body) and the healing of the whole person, body, mind and spirit.

Michelle Bachelet, newly appointed Executive Director of UN Women, says, "Women's strength, women's industry, women's wisdom are humankind's greatest untapped resource." At this time in the history of humankind, we are slowly moving to heal the disparity between the subordination of half the human race and the utilization of the potential of all people. "Women hold up half the sky," the Chinese proverb says, and we remember in the Hebrew texts that men and women are both made in the image of God. Perhaps our communities will begin to know the fullness of salvation, wholeness and healing when women are educated and encouraged to speak and to enact the roles and leadership that their gifts and calling lead them into.



*The small but firebrand speaker during the protest actions leading to the People Power II uprising that ousted then president Joseph Estrada, Carmen "Nanay Mameng" Deunida, is a veteran urban poor mass leader in the Philippines. Protesters from all walks of life including the police listen to her whenever she spoke during rallies.
Photo: Ilang Ilang Quijano*

CCA's theme for these five years is "Called to Reconcile, Prophecy and Heal." May the audacious woman of Jesus' encounter model for us such a vision, where our faith leads us to act as advocates for the most vulnerable in the world and to bring about healing for all, in the name of Christ.

Pamela Tankersley

The Very Rev. Pamela Tankersley, immediate past Moderator of General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand, is a member of the CCA Program Area Committee of Faith, Mission and Unity for 2010-21015.

Healing and wholeness

It was not an accident that I began my journey on understanding health, healing and wholeness in relationship with what is happening in our society. It was my involvement in working with the people that made me realize that there is an alternative to the way we practice medicine through healing from the perspective of the life and work of our Lord Jesus Christ. I started working on healing and wholeness issues since I got transformed by my involvement with people in the late 70's. People were getting sick of preventable illnesses but health was not in their hands. It was in the hands of those in the medical establishments. We popularized the idea of putting health in the hands of the people - people as healers. We made this as our mission in the National Council of Churches in the Philippines (NCCP) through the National Ecumenical Health Concerns Committee (NEHCC) created under the Division of Family Ministries of the Commission on Development and Social Concerns (CDSC) led by Rev. Henry Aguilan and Ms. Violeta Marasigan I.

Health in the hands of the people

We, at NCCP and the member churches popularized the concept of the congregations as healing communities or communities that care and created support groups to facilitate healing and wholeness in communities. It includes advocating for change in structures that contribute to poverty and ill health such as the structural adjustment policies that privatize social services and the impact of neo-liberal economic policies on the health of peoples. As a medical doctor, I learned much from the people's sharing about the impact of these policies in their lives through my visit to the *sacadas* (workers in sugarcane plantations) in Negros Oriental. The *sacadas* gave those of us visiting their places of work a lecture on how structures contribute

to ill health. They opened my eyes to elevate the practice of medicine not only in dealing with microbes and parasites but also in working for justice.

The Christian Women's Association (CWA) of the United Church of Christ in the Philippines (UCCP) signed a petition to enact the Generic Drugs Act. We learned from the examples of 'seeds of health' popularized in CONTACT, a publication of the Christian Medical Commission (CMC) of the World Council of Churches (WCC). We emphasized the importance of Primary Health Care (PHC) and ensured that the declaration of Alma Ata on PHC was not only rhetorical but is rooted into the realities of our people. We promoted and popularized community based health programs in many parts of the Philippines even if the concept was becoming subversive in the eyes of the military during the Marcos dictatorship period because it was returning power into the hands of the people - awakening the people on the social causes of ill health, organizing people for change, advocating for alternative healing. There was a time when mere possession of acupuncture needles, polar bear liniment and *tubao* (ethnic handkerchief) makes one a candidate for surveillance.

We promoted Bible Studies that enable us to discern the situation and demonstrate the example of Jesus' witness and how we can apply this in our daily lives. As women, we examined our own bent-overness and identified the structures that contribute to such bent-overness. I vividly remember my time in a remote church in Palawan where the Presidents of the CWA were introduced by Edna Orteza to the concept of healing and wholeness from the perspective of the bent-over woman. That event was life changing among the CWA Presidents. They signed the petition in Congress on the Generics Bill and called for the release of a detained Methodist deaconess.

Inter-continental and Inter-cultural learning on healing and wholeness

The WCC - CMC organized the South to South Program for Asians and Africans to learn from the Yayasan Indonesia Sejahtera (YIS) and Dana Sehat Program in Solo, Indonesia. We met

community leaders, health workers and the people can work together to identify problems, needs and capacities of people to work for better health. The wealth of these experiences and our interactions as Asians and Africans helped us in going back to our own places to improve the understanding on health, healing and



Healing includes advocating for change in structures that contribute to poverty and ill health. The 2010 AEC participants animating the morning worship during the CCA Assembly in Kuala Lumpur in 2010. Photo: The AEC 2010, by Vuluk Lai, Chao-Tsai

with the late Dr. Lucas Hendrata, the late Mary Johnson, R.N. and Dr. G. Nugroho and discussed their experiences in working with people. Dana Sehat developed a prepaid health care scheme, which raised the income, improved living conditions and increased the community's understanding about health and its relationship with environment and nutrition. YIS promoted self-sufficiency in development and the framework of integrated social health program. These 'seeds of health' were featured in CONTACT and inspired us to do a framework on health that is not isolated from social conditions. We learned that

wholeness.

The Christian Conference of Asia's (CCA) Development and Service Desk, then under Rev. Harvey Perkins and health consultant, Susan Rifkin, helped promote healing and wholeness in Asia by conducting Workshops on Community Based Health Programs using the examples in different places of Asia. CCA brought us in contact with Chinese medicine. I studied acupuncture for one month in Hong Kong under a scholarship program of CCA through Rev. Tosh Arai. I was introduced to the concept of medicine from the

oriental point of view, which shows the interconnection of the five elements of nature: wood, fire, earth, metal, water and the creative and destructive cycles. I learned about the yin and yang, and that there is a yin in a yang, and a yang in yin. It is a dynamic interrelation and once it is broken, it causes disharmony, ill health and wholeness is broken. I returned to the Philippines and introduced this into our existing health programs in different churches.

offered a gift of a Hindu image of deity. Inter-religious dialogue is recognized as an important part of Mission in Asia.

Healing for Bishop Coorilos is not the kind that takes place in mass healing crusades. He does not believe in this type of miracles. He believes in the miracle of caring for the needy in a sustained way, such as being with the mentally retarded children, sharing in their lives and learning from them. He sees it in those who work with people living with HIV and AIDS and in the realization that they “only lost their immunities but not their humanity”, a testimony he heard from a South African woman. Jesus demonstrated what it means to minister to the needs of people seeking to be healed as he went around the villages and encountered them in their context of despair. He also recognized their great faith in the healing of the Centurion’s Servant (Luke 7:1-10); and in the healing of the Syrophenician woman’s daughter (Mark 7: 24-30).

Bishop Coorilos underscored the need to be in touch with people’s reality and with the resources we have from within and from without. He challenged us to name the evil forces and exorcise or contest them. Healing is not just removing the virus or bacteria or parasites in our bodies but dealing with the structures and ways of life that perpetuate infection, parasitism and even acute and chronic illnesses. McDonalds and all the fast food chains are taking the place of healthy meals prepared from our own kitchens. It made me think of the value of raising our own organically grown vegetables and consuming bananas and sweet potatoes rather than buying expensive fries.

I reflected on the rate people are destroying the forests to amass wealth that does not look at the implications for future generations. Forest depletion displaced many of its inhabitants and eroded the soil, washing away the healthier part of the soil necessary for the natural nutrition of plants and animals. People destroyed the dwelling places of rats and now we find them living together with us in our communities. The depletion of the forest creates global warming, flooding and other forms of ecological imbalance



*Dr. Erlinda Senturias with Rev. Johannes Petrus Mokgethi-Heath, Acting Executive Director, INERELA+, during a panel discussion at the Ecumenical Advocacy Alliance consultation on AIDS in March 2011. AS CCA’s Consultant on HIV and AIDS, Dr Senturias gave a presentation on faith-based responses to HIV in Asia.
Photo: Christopher Rajkumar*

Healing and wholeness as our challenge in mission

All of these experiences came back to me as I listened to the lecture of His Grace, Metropolitan Dr. Geevarghese Mor Coorilos at Union Theological Seminary in the Philippines on February 2, 2011. Bishop Coorilos talked about Mission in three points. First, Mission as Contestation, i.e. naming and exorcising the evils of society, and identifying “empire building” as one of the evils in the post-colonial time that we need to contest. Second, Mission as Healing, citing the story where Jesus made mud from his saliva and the earth, put it on the eyes of the blind man and asked him to go wash in Siloam and there the blind man received his sight (John 9:11). Bishop Coorilos called this ‘organic healing’ and urged us to continue to promote healing that is related to nature and that recognizes the situation of people. Third, Mission as Dialogue with Life, such as the gifts of inter-religious dialogue. A Muslim who was healed by a Hindu doctor

that have implications on nutrition, diseases that we experience such as bird flu, swine flu, leptospirosis, more dengue and malaria. The heat caused by global warming has also increased the number of heat-related illnesses. A study showed that there are more people who suffer from hypertension because of the warmer climates.

God has granted us natural resources for healing but we also have commercialized most of these that they become unreachable for the vast majority of the people. We have also created the myth that there is a pill for every ill. We have fragmented our understanding of healing instead of looking at life from its holistic perspective.

In isolating healing from nature, we have also forgotten about our relationships with

isolation from community life.

Our continuing mission

God invites us to fullness of life. Healing and wholeness is about experiencing forgiveness (forgiving and being forgiven) as part of the grace of God. It is about friends determined to help people in need to encounter Jesus and to experience the forgiveness of sins (Mark 2:1-12). It is about bravely touching the hem of Jesus' garment and being restored in community (Mark 5:25-34). It is about bravely encountering God, challenging assumptions and demonstrating our dignity and great faith in God's healing power. It is about rising up and taking our beds and walking in joy. It is about walking and leaping and praising God when



Rev. Sanan Wutti of the CCT (Church of Christ of Thailand) AIDS Ministry, Prangtip Ya-anant, Metropolitan Dr Geevarghese Mor Coorilos and Panupong Duangnet during the Forum of PLWHIV+ in April 2010 in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. Prangtip and Panupong shared their stories as children living with HIV at the forum. Photo: Janejinda Pawadee

God, with one another, with ourselves and with the whole of creation. Healing is a dynamic relationship of all that binds nature together and ultimately the whole of creation. It is the healing of broken relationships. Healing goes beyond medicine. Once healed, the mentally ill man from Gerasene who wanted to join Jesus, was told to "Go home, to your friends, and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and what mercy he has shown you" (Mark 5:19). The man was not put in an institution but was asked to go back to his community. Our lack of care for the mentally ill puts them in

we experience wholeness. It is about praying, "I believe; help my unbelief" (Mark 9:24b). It is about getting ready for surprises when Jesus walks with us and we fail to recognize him. It is about the Holy Eucharist that reminds us that it is God who heals our broken nature. It is believing that those who are sick can also partake in the healing ministry. It is about our faith that makes us whole.

Praise God for healing and wholeness. Make us Healers, O God!

Erlinda N. Senturias

Pastoral Letter

08 March 2011

Dear Sisters and Brothers in the CCA Member Churches and Councils:

We, Members of the General Committee of the Christian Conference of Asia, write to you from our second meeting in Chiang Mai, this 7th to 9th of March 2011, to affirm the mandate, recommendations and the proposed programs coming from the 13th CCA Assembly held in Kuala Lumpur in April 2010.

We listened to stories from communities suffering from the impact of emergencies, the violation of people's rights, freedom of expression and the practice of religion, along with poverty, lack of access to employment and other provisions necessary for decent living for people created in God's image.

We continue to discern God's leading as we hear people's cries and are challenged by the need to accompany them and our Member Churches and Councils as we minister together in our region of Asia.

In this meeting of the CCA General Committee, we have listened and reflected on urgent ecumenical issues and challenges before us -

1. We would like to see CCA continue to strengthen the capacity of its members to respond appropriately and in a timely manner to emergencies experienced by Member Churches and Councils in Asia. We heard and prayed for the victims of the recent earthquake that shook Christchurch in Aotearoa New Zealand, taking the lives of more than 160 people and causing massive destruction to homes and public infrastructures. We offer solidarity and prayers to the victims' communities as they rise from the rubble and as they gain access to social services and rehabilitate themselves in the aftermath of the earthquake.

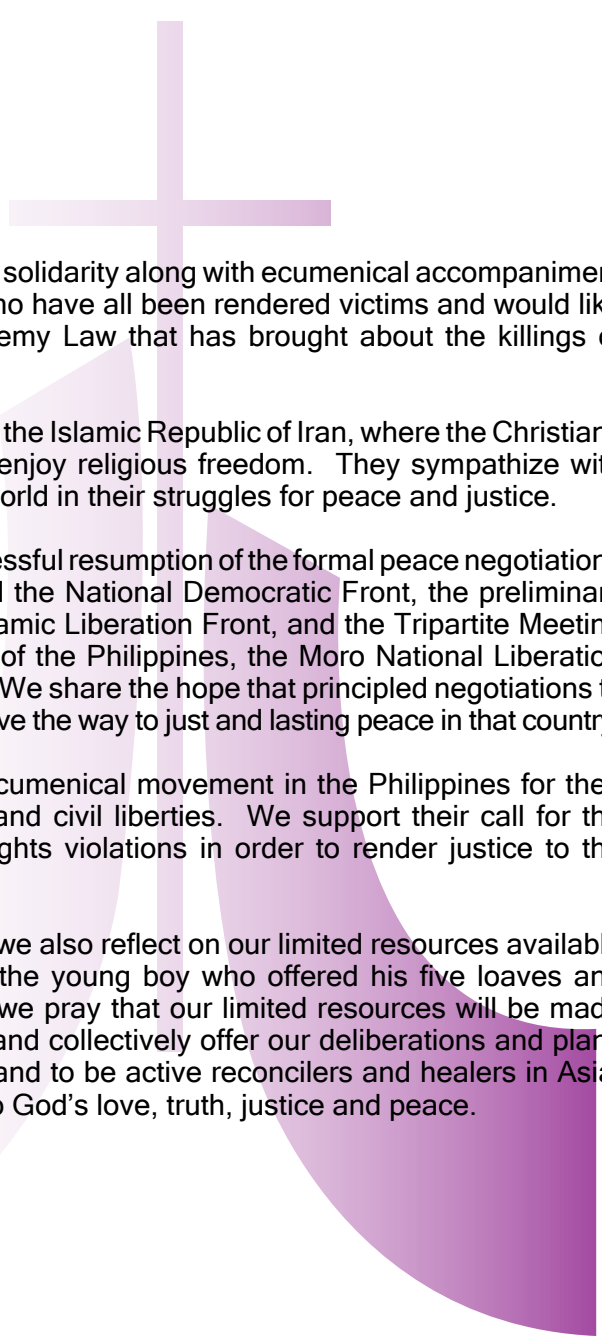
The CCA response will be in the form of a pastoral visit by ecumenical leaders to the churches and the affected communities in Aotearoa New Zealand.

2. We heard the voices of our brothers and sisters who share the Korean Peninsula, whose security, safety and peace continue to be threatened by their fragile and uncertain situation brought about by hardening positions of their respective governments and the intervention of external powers. We will continue to support initiatives -

- 2.1. Of both North and South Korea to commit to work for mutual respect and trust in order to overcome differences in ideology and systems;
- 2.2. For the two sides to agree to create a special peace zone and to reopen a corridor for humanitarian assistance (including food and medicine) into North Korea.
- 2.3. We support the campaign to replace the current Armistice Agreement with a Peace Treaty.

We appeal to the Heads of State of both North and South Korea to do everything within their powers to ensure dialogue and the peaceful settlement of the border conflict that has rendered the Korean people captive for many years.

3. We are shocked and saddened by the recent assassination of Mr. Shabaz Bhatti, Minister for Minority Affairs and the only Christian Parliament Member in the Pakistan Government. CCA supports the call for an urgent and impartial investigation of the case and to bring the perpetrators



to justice. The churches in Asia offer prayers and solidarity along with ecumenical accompaniment of both Muslims and non-Muslims in Pakistan who have all been rendered victims and would like to see the control of the misuse of the Blasphemy Law that has brought about the killings of innocent civilians with impunity.

4. We thank God for the presence of Christians in the Islamic Republic of Iran, where the Christians with other religious minorities, to some extent, enjoy religious freedom. They sympathize with their Christian sisters and brothers all over the world in their struggles for peace and justice.

5. We rejoice with the Filipino people for the successful resumption of the formal peace negotiations between the Government of the Philippines and the National Democratic Front, the preliminary talks between the Government and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front, and the Tripartite Meeting on the Final Peace Accord by the Government of the Philippines, the Moro National Liberation Front and the Organization of Islamic Countries. We share the hope that principled negotiations to resolve the issues giving rise to the conflicts will pave the way to just and lasting peace in that country.

We are encouraged by the churches and the ecumenical movement in the Philippines for their steadfast prophetic advocacy of human rights and civil liberties. We support their call for the speedy and impartial investigation of human rights violations in order to render justice to the victims and the perpetrators of human indignity.

As we affirm the ministry and programs of CCA, we also reflect on our limited resources available to carry out our many and urgent tasks. Like the young boy who offered his five loaves and two fish that helped feed the hungry multitude, we pray that our limited resources will be made sufficient with God's blessings. We prayerfully and collectively offer our deliberations and plans as we respond to the call to be more prophetic and to be active reconcilers and healers in Asia, where we are called to minister and to witness to God's love, truth, justice and peace.

Yours in faith and solidarity,

For the Members, CCA General Committee:

The Presidium

(Signed)
REV. REX R. B. REYES, JR.

(Signed)
DR. K. B. ROKAYA

(Signed)
MS. VAN ARUNRASMEY

(Signed)
REV. RETNO NGAPON

(Signed)
REV. DR. HENRIETTE HUTABARAT LEBANG
General Secretary

Life-giving agriculture

Agriculture is a life-giving culture and a way of life for many Asian communities. Agriculture then was a way life in harmony with nature. It was never centralized those days, and farmers in their communities had a direct hand in shaping agricultural practices, based on a sound understanding of how nature worked. Farmers cultivated the land with least destruction of natural resources. Soil fertility and regeneration was given great importance in their way of farming.

Modern agriculture systems have been proving to be exhaustive, exploitative and abusive towards nature and human beings. Land is increasingly being used and exploited not for food and livelihood security, but for export oriented production, trade and commerce. Strong use of chemicals is an important impact of the changes in the agriculture which has been affecting the health and well being of millions of people in the world.

A growing movement for Life Giving Agriculture (LGA) has emerged in the last few decades in different parts of Asia. This movement questions the role of the mainstream agricultural establishment in promoting practices that challenge economic, ecological and social sustainability.

CCA has taken a leading role in promoting LGA since the mid-2005. The LGA Forum in Korea has been another church-related outfit that has been at the forefront for establishing an agricultural system based on organic farming.

CCA's Justice, International Affairs, Development and Service (JID) organized the second consultation on LGA on November 22-26, 2010, a follow-up of the first one held in Korea in 2006. Jointly organized with the National Christian Council of Sri Lanka (NCC SL) held in Kandy and Colombo in Sri Lanka, 35 participants from 10 Asian countries participated at the consultation.

The participants recommended the following:

- Prevention of soil depletion by building ridges on sloping land or utilizing Sloping Agricultural Land Technology systems, and mulching.
- Complete recycling of all organic matter and organic waste to improve the fertility of the top soil and to maximize the microbial activity. Use animal wastes, improve soil fertility and microbial activity.
- Enhancement of microbial activity by avoiding the use of chemical inputs such as chemical fertilizer, pesticides and weedicides.
- Mixed cropping instead of monocultures. Mixed cropping reduces pest damages and enhances natural pest control.
- Retention of moisture in the soil without using much water. Maximizing yield with less water needs to be a farmer's objective.
- Ecological initiatives such as household production of biofertilizers and community level production of biopesticides can build community strengths on the foundation of people's existing capacity.
- Highlighting the importance of evolving sound policies for sustainable agriculture by the governments in Asian countries.
- Promoting, recognizing and acknowledging that a farmer has the inalienable and fundamental right to own land.

Participants also urged CCA to formulate a policy document on LGA for wider dissemination among the Asian churches, and to initiate and support a network of farmers in the rural churches

around Asia. Furthermore, CCA is asked to set up an Asian working group on LGA, and to start a website for broader dissemination of information on LGA.

Churches and the civil society movements in Asia are called to:

- Introduce organic farming as a subject in the church-run educational institutions
 - Raise awareness about organic farming among people irrespective of religion and beliefs
 - Help rural pastors and church
- committed rural leadership who values life and who live side by side with rural people,
 - Build consumer awareness about organic farming and sustainable living,
 - Recognize and reward organic farmers and communities for their services for the betterment of the environment and society.
 - Lobby against governments' agricultural policies which are detrimental to the development of economically and ecologically sustainable agricultural practices.



Mr Thilak (center), of the SANASA organic farm in Matale, Sri Lanka, shows participants the use of compost fertilizer for vegetables.

members maintain ecological values by providing them education and information about LGA

- Provide community education for sustainable agriculture
- Train and nurture dedicated and

For the text of the full Statement, see: www.cca.org.hk

Freddy de Alwis

AMCU circle widens

If the fourth gathering of the Asian Movement for Christian Unity (AMCU IV) in 2007 was the first one in which the Asia Evangelical Alliance (then Evangelical Fellowship of Asia) participated, AMCU V was the one in which the Asia Pentecostal Society (APS) participated for the first time. The Global Christian Forum (GCF) was instrumental in enabling APS to join AMCU V as it was also for AEA in AMCU IV.

“One in the apostles’ teaching, fellowship, breaking of bread and prayer” (cf. Acts 2:42). This theme of the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity in 2011 was also the theme of AMCU V on 2-4 December 2010 in Bangkok, Thailand.

The theme was expounded in three panels, with a representative each from CCA, FABC and AEA and APS. The first panel was on “One in the apostles’ teaching”; the second on “One in the gift and task of fellowship in Christ”; and the third on “One in the breaking of bread and prayer.”

It did not take long for us to realize, as we were preparing for the gathering, that the very issues of unity mentioned in this biblical verse are in fact at the very core of our disunity as Christians. There were initial apprehensions that the theme would touch on very sensitive doctrinal issues and traditions of the represented church bodies that could not be resolved - e.g. the Eucharist and women’s ordination.

But evading those parts to avoid debate or argumentation would not have been a good way out. For how could we be truthful to the biblical passage on which the theme was based if we tried to remove something that is explicitly there? How could we foster genuine relationship of trust and friendship, solidarity and partnership, if we just relate to each other in a superficial way - where we cannot even question or argue or debate?

Organizers therefore agreed to face the problem squarely, admitting our limitations - e.g. our lack of unity at coming together to the Lord’s Table and dealing with issues of gender justice - and to try to highlight our hope for the future.

As it turned out, the gathering was an open space for honest sharing, with questions for one another, raised honestly but gently. There was also the willingness to listen to each other, not attack the other. Each side tried to respond to questions raised simply to explain their positions without being too necessarily defensive or aggressive.

It is very clear that different Christian groups understand and appropriate the apostles’ teachings differently. While some affirm the permanent value of the “actual apostolic teachings”, others speak of the need to contextualize such teachings in light of the challenges and realities that we face.

Similarly, different Christian groups understand and appropriate fellowship in Christ differently. Some take the word fellowship in terms of the special horizontal closeness shared among Christians as a result of their vertical relationship with Christ. But some affirm that such a fellowship can even extend to the whole of creation.

Bishop Nathanael Lazaro of the CCA delegation said, “If instead of insisting on our parochial agendas, Christians will look at the broad dimensions of God’s salvation - the redemption of the whole of creation - we can even work and fellowship with those who are not of the faith - in the common fight against unrighteousness and evil. If we truly make God the sole object of worship, openness to fellowship will become a reality.”

Different Christian groups have different understandings of the hospitality in the table of the Lord. “If Christ is the host, why do we restrict it to Christians alone? Are children, the mentally challenged, and people of other faiths not capable of understanding the mystery of God?” These were questions raised by Fr. Dr. K M George of the Indian Orthodox Syrian Church, who asked for alternative models for the new century and the new world situation.

Pointing to the reality of full and partial communion, Fr. Batairwa K. Paulin of FABC pointed out that “sharing in the one body and the one cup remains a dream of the real but still imperfect unity of the

Body of Christ. More theological sharing and discussions as the one being held here are needed to revisit the justifications of the impediments for a full communion.”

Other panel speakers were Dr. Henriette Hutabarat Lebang of CCA, Bishop Theotonius Gomes of FABC, Rev. Dr. Richard Howell of AEA, Rev. Sherman Kuek of FABC, and Rev. Joseph Suico of APS.

There were also discussions on key topics - conflict transformation, interfaith relations and cooperation, promoting human dignity and care for creation. Speakers were the Rev. Dr. Richard Howell of AEA, Sr. Dr. Clemens Mendonca of FABC, and Rev. Kim Kyung In of CCA.

At the end of the gathering, participants shared their evaluation which included the following comments:

- “This gathering has developed a sense of

sharing in confidence, a sharing from one heart to the other. We do not decide on the conclusion for the Holy Spirit will do that for us.” [Bishop Theotonius Gomes of FABC]

- “Something happened to me here - I felt being welcomed and heard for what I had to share.” [Rev. Dr. Richard Howell of AEA]
- “This gathering has been a trusted space. People felt freer to ask questions that have always been on their minds.” [Fr. KM George of CCA]

The group recommended the holding of the AMCU gathering every three years - with a three-year cycle of CATS, ACTS and AMCU. But it was strongly suggested that efforts of relating and working with the different churches should be pursued at the local level.

Hope S. Antone



Small group discussion at AMCU V: Rev. Fr. K. M. George (Orthodox), Mr. Mathew Ifrahim Akhter (Evangelical), Rev. Dr. Richard Howell (Evangelical), Rev. Sherman Kuek (Roman Catholic) and Sr. Clemens Mendonca (Roman Catholic)

Asia's role in ecumenism

“Asia has to play a crucial role if the ecumenical movement has to survive. In a context where the prophetic emphasis of justice tends to be marginalized and the influence from economic globalization is huge, there is a need to keep Asian issues (e.g. interreligious dialogue and justice) central in the ecumenical movement.”

These were the words of challenge from Metropolitan Dr. Geevarghese Mor Coorilos of the Malankara Jacobite Syrian Orthodox Church in India. As moderator of the Commission on World Mission and Evangelism of the World Council of Churches, he was invited as a resource person at the Program Area Committee meeting of CCA-Faith, Mission and Unity on 9-13 February in Bangkok, Thailand.

Bishop Coorilos also spoke of recovering the true sense of mission which is turning to God, the initiator of mission. The fact that God is Trinity means that there is plurality - with each identity being preserved rather than compromised; there is egalitarian and inclusive community - where the Holy Spirit is seen as feminine.

Referring to the CCA General Assembly theme, “Called to Prophecy, Reconcile and Heal”, Bishop Coorilos spoke of the need to recover the crucified Christ instead of the crusading Christ in our mission. Christ carried out God’s mission in order to bring about fullness of life, reconciliation and healing.

Since part of Christ’s ministry is the prophetic ministry, Asians also need to be prophetic by resisting empires. It is very clear that Satan is not an individual but a system (“My name is Legion; for

we are many.” - Mark 5:9). This system is clearly manifested in moneytheism, which has influenced the churches today, instead of monotheism.

For the first time since they were elected at the April 2010 CCA General Assembly in Kuala Lumpur, CCA-FMU PAC members met in a theological workshop on emerging issues. Present were Rev. Mangisi Simorangkir of Indonesia, Rev. Prof. Lee Se Hyoung of Korea, Ms. Kanan Kitani of Japan, Rev. Saman Perera of Sri Lanka, Very Rev. Jason Selvaraj of Malaysia, Rev. Tobias Brandner of Hong Kong, Rev. Dr. Chiu Shu-Pin of Taiwan and Ms. Anasheh Begijanian of Iran.

Rev. Subodh Mondal from India, Ms. Sous Navy from Cambodia, Ms. Prescila Passang Dema from Bhutan, Rev. Dr. San Myat Shwe from Myanmar and the Very Rev. Pamela Tankersley of Aotearoa New Zealand could not come due to prior commitments.

Members shared their country realities, highlighting their struggles and challenges as minority Christian communities. It was also the first time for a CCA committee to hear about realities in Iran, since the Armenian Orthodox Church just joined CCA in April 2010.

The group analyzed the impact of these country realities on theologizing and mission. They realized that even though Asian societies have always been plural (diverse) in cultures, races and religions, theologies and mission being promoted are those that deny or look down on plurality and instead promote uniformity daubed as universality.

The group recognized that the approaches to mission have also

reflected the colonial tendencies - e.g. conquest approach, fishing (giving out bait) approach, and scare approach (e.g. "if you don't believe you will burn in hell"). If plurality was recognized and celebrated as part of the creation of God, then the approach to mission would have been solidarity (kenosis or self-emptying as in the way of Christ). Solidarity requires sincere identification with the people in their own situations.

The group affirmed that contextualization is not a going back to something like a pure Asian context, but critically dealing with

Committee members bemoaned the fact that Ecumenism is not taught as a required subject in many seminaries in Asia. Or if it is taught, it is treated simply as a historical movement but does not offer tools for today's generation to be ecumenical in perspective and way of life. In view of this the group welcomed the publication project of a resource book on teaching ecumenism by the CCA-FMU and WCC/ETE (World Council of Churches/Ecumenical Theological Education) and hopes that it will be a textbook not only for seminaries but also for the churches.



contemporary issues with the wisdom and values of Asia. This includes having an interreligious perspective and some literacy in the Asian religions; being more compassionate rather than condemning of people with HIV AIDS; and being more connected with and concerned about nature or environment.

The group considered the possibility of coming up with a Code of Conduct for Mission and to begin with what is already there in their respective contexts.

The FMU - PAC members and CCA staff, with Metropolitan Dr. Geevarghese Mor Coorilos (center).

Hope S. Antone

Peace advocates meet



All the country coordinators with Bruce van Voorhis and Max Ediger (2nd from right).

The Working Committee of the Interfaith Cooperation Forum (ICF) met at the Brokenshire Convention Center in Davao City, Mindanao, the Philippines on February 7-9, 2011.

The ICF Working Committee is composed of Max Ediger and Bruce van Voorhis from ICF, Kohei Yamada from the Asia Pacific Alliance of YMCAs, Carlos Ocampo from CCA, National (country) Coordinators Hor Hen (Cambodia), Umi Farida (Indonesia), Ait Bahadur Tumbahangphe (Nepal), Nor Samad (Philippines), and Pornpimon Ponprom (Thailand).

The different roles of the ICF national coordinators and working committee members were discussed with the national coordinators being responsible for ICF activities within their countries and the working committee members focusing on ICF programs throughout the region. The ICF national coordinators are expected to facilitate one or two meetings annually with other School of Peace (SOP) alumni and planning and organizing activities in their countries with them, expanding the ICF network in their countries and recommending SOP alumni in their countries for ICF internships. In addition, the national coordinators would be involved in developing an ICF network at the sub-regional level.

Possible workshops for 2011 include a writing workshop to produce a book on indigenous spirituality, a similar writing workshop on the topic

of Justpeace education for children and youth, and other workshops on faith and gender, how to initiate interfaith dialogue, conduct media campaigns and produce documentaries.

The meeting also noted the need to strengthen the ICF network's advocacy role in the region through, for example, organizing programs that would upgrade the journalism, film-making and documentation skills of SOP alumni and conducting interfaith fact-finding missions in some of Asia's conflict or post-conflict areas, such as Mindanao, the Thai-Myanmar border, southern Thailand and Sri Lanka.

Another major initiative discussed was the development of a network of religious and academic institutions in Asia to which SOP alumni could be referred for further study and that could provide resource people for ICF programs. ICF also plans to foster an interfaith exchange program of religious scholars between these institutions as well.

CCA runs a *School for Peace Advocates in the Churches*, a week-long workshop and exposure. It also recommends peace advocates to the ICF for longer training period and in efforts at strengthening the role of Muslims, Buddhists and other faith traditions in peace building.

Carlos Ocampo

Myanmar Churches: HIV Competent

In a recent press release, Ban Ki Moon, General Secretary of the United Nations recommends the AIDS response that will: “Reduce by 50% the sexual transmission of HIV - including among key populations, such as young people, men who have sex with men, in the context of sex work; and prevent all new HIV infections as a result of injecting drug use; eliminate HIV transmission from mother to child; reduce by 50% tuberculosis deaths in people living with HIV; ensure HIV treatment for 13 million people; reduce by 50% the number of countries with HIV-related restrictions on entry, stay and residence; and ensure equal access to education for children orphaned and made vulnerable by AIDS.”

CCA will contribute to this campaign through Building HIV Competent Churches in the Mekong countries. Myanmar is one of the countries included in this project. Dr. Erlinda Senturias visited faith-based organizations in Myanmar on March 26-31, 2011. Two churches in Yangon were identified as HIV Competent: The Methodist Church (Upper Myanmar) Yangon Society led by Rev. Mang and Judson Church led by Rev. Dr. Arthur Ko Lay.

The Myanmar Council of Churches HIV Program has organized the Myanmar Positive Christian Fellowship and Self Help Groups among drug users and women living with HIV. The Myanmar Catholic HIV and AIDS Network organized only in

July 2010 led by Sr. Mary Grenough, MM, has been conducting seminar workshops in different regions of Myanmar while the Karuna Myanmar Social Services is encouraging their diocesan programs to engage meaningfully in developing HIV programs. The Myanmar Baptist Convention is reviving its AIDS program started in different departments in 1992. Since 2006, the program is under the Social Service Department. A new phase beginning this year will concentrate on helping the most affected areas of the Shan State.

These faith-based organizations are part of the Myanmar Interfaith Network on AIDS (MINA) that has made a commitment on its first year anniversary on November 18, 2010, to overcome barriers that block access to effective HIV prevention, treatment, care and support, medicines, commodities and services and to embrace the lives of people living with HIV and AIDS with respect, love and compassion by inviting them to join the religious rites in the communities. They will also address stigma and discrimination, provide basic information, integrate food and nutritional support, improve the income earning opportunities for vulnerable persons and mobilize to counteract human trafficking.

Erlinda N. Senturias

Dr. Erlinda N. Senturias (standing, Center) with the 7 Network of Myanmar.



EAA meets in Chiang Mai



Consultation participants.

Fifty members and partners of the Ecumenical Advocacy Alliance (EAA) attended the HIV Consultation in Chiang Mai, Thailand on March 20-22, 2011. The consultation aimed to strengthen the Christian advocacy on HIV of members and to discover how members are working on the theme: "Live the Promise" particularly on the framework for Action (2009-2012): addressing the root causes of vulnerability to HIV; achieving Universal Access; eliminating stigma and discrimination; and ensuring accountability and sufficient resources.

Mr. Carlos Ocampo, Joint Executive Secretary of CCA Justice, International Affairs, Development and Service gave the welcome greetings on behalf of the CCA General Secretary, Rev. Dr. Henriette Hutabarat-Lebang. Dr. Prawate Khid-arn, EAA Board Member and former general secretary of CCA gave the reflection at the opening worship. The opening plenary on March 20 was on the Global Response to HIV and AIDS - where we are and where we need to go now. Presentors were Mr. Steve Kraus, Director, UNAIDS, Regional Support Team - Asia Pacific; Dr. Jean-Louis Lamboray, Chair, Constellation for AIDS Competence; Rev. Johannes Petrus Mokgethi-Heath, Acting Executive Director, INERELA+; and Dr. Erlinda Senturias, CCA Consultant for HIV and AIDS.

Dr. Senturias presented the faith-based responses to HIV in Asia that has around 5 million people

living with HIV to date. The continuing challenge is to harness the potential of faith-based communities in building inner and outer competencies on HIV, rights-based approach to programming, theology and HIV, and securing a safe space for dialogue on HIV and Human Sexuality.

Case studies were presented and one of them is by a CCA member, the National Council of Churches in India (NCCI) on Light a Lamp - Pledge for Rights, by Mr. Christopher Rajkumar, NCCI Executive Secretary for the Commission on Justice, Peace and Creation. Participants visited the CAM Office, a Buddhist monastery taking care of PLWH, and the Thai Government's Care Center for children affected by HIV. Group discussions identified priorities for joint action within the "Live the Promise" Campaign Framework. Simultaneous group sessions tackled topics on strengthening religious leadership in responses to HIV; deepening theological reflection on human rights and HIV; and improving faith-based advocacy on access to medicines.

CCA is an active member of the EAA, and Dr Senturias is a member of its HIV Advisory Group. Dr. Liza Lamis, CCA Communications Consultant, also attended the consultation representing the World YWCA in her capacity as its Advisor on Feminist Theologies.

Erlinda N. Senturias

Rivers of Life

Let them flow as they are

Children participating in the ECMC campaign for saving the Rivers of Life. The poster the children are displaying celebrates the many forms of natural water, rivers, streams and rain.
Photo: PROK



We, the Presbyterian Church in the Republic of Korea (PROK) fervently appeal to our Christian sisters and brothers in Asia to join our prayer to prevent the destruction of the ecosystems of South Korea and to protect the integrity of God's creation.

South Koreans live and engage in economic activities around the country's four major rivers. As the rivers are the main sources of life and culture, the devastation of the rivers will bring about an irreversible disaster to people and nature as a whole. We who believe in God the Creator therefore confess that the most important mission given to the South Korean Churches at this time is to protect the rivers that are being destroyed by human greed and violated by heavy machines.

The Lee Myung-Bak government launched the Four Major Rivers Restoration Project in November 2009 and has been pushing the project stubbornly since then, while disregarding the strong opposition of almost 70% of Korean people. Without a comprehensive technical examination and environmental assessment, the government is carrying out a rough-and-ready process of dredging up mud from the bottom of the

rivers and building underwater riverbed sills. The process disturbs and destroys the ecosystem of the rivers. The pretext of government in carrying out this project is to control seasonal floods and to offset the effects of drought. However, there is a suspicion that the government's real intention is to distribute huge profits from this mega construction among the supporters of government such as owners of construction companies.

In this context, the PROK issued statements together with other civil and religious organizations pointing out the unjust, anti-democratic and anti-life nature of the Four Rivers Restoration Project. The PROK also has organized prayer gatherings asking for God's help and guidance to save these rivers of life against the project of death.

In 2010 the PROK led a Lent fasting-and-prayer campaign from Ash Wednesday until 11 October. Around 700 people including rural ministers, lay people, youth, theological seminary students and activists participated in a pilgrimage of 634 kilometers throughout the basin of the four major rivers expressing sincere repentance to all the creatures of God.

This 2011 the PROK has started a Lent

fasting-and-prayer campaign from 9 March for justice, peace, life and church in similar way as the 2010 campaign. During Lent, every Wednesday and Thursday are prayer days for life, and one of the main prayer titles is "For all the lives suffering from the Four Major Rivers Project."

We shall not stop our prayers until the project of the government is stopped. The PROK will launch another movement, "Ten-thousand PROK Members' Declaration for Saving the Rivers of Life", to run from 22 March, the International Day of Water, to the World Council of Churches' Environmental Sunday on 5 June. The Declaration along with signatures gathered from the PROK members from all over the country will be announced on Environmental Sunday and the PROK will commit again to saving life.

The PROK will continue to do her best to stop the anti-life project and maintain the integrity of the creation of God in

solidarity with those who are struggling. We, the PROK, ask you to pray together with us in the name of Jesus Christ, the Lord of life.

Note: On 15 February 2011, the court ruled that the enforced construction on the organic farms near the Han River, where the PROK held a fasting-and-prayer campaign, is unjust. This judgment was the first brake put on the government project. We ask our brothers and sisters to send letters to President Lee Myung-Bak, to addresses below, urging him to halt the project so that the rivers of life can freely flow.

- *The Blue House Homepage:
<http://www.president.go.kr>*
- *The Blue House E-mail:
president@president.go.kr*
- *The Blue House Address:
Cheongwadae-ro, Jongno-gu, Seoul*

*Rev. Dr. Bae Tae Jin
General Secretary, The Presbyterian
Church in the Republic of Korea*



Worship during 2010 fasting and prayer campaign on the banks of Bukhan River . Photo: PROK

The economic exiles

Weaving the strands of healing

It is but necessary and appropriate that CCA pays attention to the plight and struggles of the economic exiles: the women and men migrants and marriage migrants, those who are forced to migrate, who suffer discrimination, racism, class and sexual prejudices, those in areas engulfed by wars and state terrorism, and those subjected to religious, political and economic oppression. They moved to other places mainly because of their immediate need to survive for lack of jobs and lands to till at home. In a real sense, it is their own government that exiles them. There are millions in diaspora - wounded, exiled people of God struggling daily against various life-negating elements.

In history one finds human beings fight for life, struggle to survive, move on to new pastures, seek to realize their dreams. History is an arena of the "more than" minority and the "less than" majority or of the "few full" and the "many empty" whereby the "more than" hoard and stored up for themselves leaving only crumbs to be fought over by the "less than".

The wounded lives of the "less than" are living testimonies and witnesses to our history that is heading to so much d's -- difficulties, disasters, dangers, diseases, destructions, debts and deaths -- perpetuated mostly by wealthy nations and individual human beings backed by their invented sophisticated and destructive technology.

Yet the Bible tells us that God is at work in history. From Exodus to Golgotha God talks of health care projects. Through the prophets of old God confronted the elite and privileged in society who were authors and perpetrators of injustice. God confronted many nations and cities, big and small, for their various sins and offenses in relations to other nations.

Let us visit the city of Tyre. Tyre was a major port city and trading post in the ancient Near East, a center of progressive commerce and trade even before the time of Ezekiel. It monopolized the sea trade and emerged the richest city in the region. The book of Ezekiel chapter 27 has a long list of nations and cities engaged in business and trade with Tyre. Tyre established an unjust and unequal trade with smaller trading nations like Judah. The merchants and rulers of Tyre had much power to dictate the terms and conditions of their economic relationships with all others.

The monopoly economy not only created enormous wealth and much profit to Tyre, its traders and rulers, but also to the merchant class and ruling elite of other trading countries. Such unrighteous relationship brought so much suffering and violations of basic rights for the common people of each trading nation. Ezekiel thus declared to Tyre: "Yet you are but a mortal, and no god, though you compare your mind with mind of a god." (Ezekiel 28:2) "In the abundance of your trade you were filled with violence, and you sinned." (v. 16).

The relationship of Tyre to Judah is quite parallel to the existing relationship of the United States to North Korea, and many other developing countries. The U.S has placed heavy economic sanctions as a punishment of North Korea's non-cooperation and unwillingness to dismantle its nuclear program. It has taken actions such as freezing of North Korean assets in foreign bank accounts, and banning of export and import of goods.

In August 2010 after the sinking of South Korean warship Cheonan, the U.S. broadened its financial sanctions

by blocking the North Korean assets in the U. S. and eight firms, a way also of discouraging other banks from dealing with North Korea, thereby cutting off its access to foreign currency and imports. The U. S. has committed so many crimes against the poorer and weaker peoples of the earth. Would it ever repent and do penance for its sins?

The economic exiles have seen how

of finance capital against the working people whose share of global income has declined precipitously. Laborers are alienated from the fruits of their labor. The over-accumulation of capital in the hands of financial elite on the one hand, and the impoverishment of the vast majority on the other has accelerated over the last three decades. The working poor are made to pay the costs of the global crisis through falling incomes and



the core of the empire is shaken, now plunged in protracted depression and wars on terror, and have felt its fear that is always there, the fear of falling down the world economic and political ladder. The ongoing currency war is not really a battle between countries with current account deficits such as the U. S. versus countries with surpluses like China. It is a non-stop offensive

rising unemployment, soaring prices of basic commodities, disappearing social services, degraded infrastructures, a threatened environment, and a less educated young people. Indeed, the poor are being robbed many times over to bail out the rich, to preserve an economic monopoly by America's elite.

As crisis rages the plight of the 'less than'

*Jon Tae-II Labor
Movement
Anniversary rally
in Seoul Plaza on
November 7, 2010.*

Reflections

*The placard says: Uphold Labor Laws!
The Rev. Jang Chang-Weon is a pastor
and former coordinator of the Urban
Industrial Mission of the Presbyterian
Church of Korea (PCK). He now chairs
the Osan Workers Cultural Center, and
serves as pastor of the Dasum Church,
a Minjung Church of the PCK in Osan City.*



majority worsens. The wounded economic exiles cry out: “How long, O God, for the strands of healing to flow? In every religion such as Christianity there is always a quest for redemption, for wellness as a human being, as a community of persons and as a nation. In Christ’s incarnation, the whole of creation is given the offer of salvation. This is the scope of healing.

How does God’s equation of justice work? The Christian gospel speaks both to the culprits and victims of injustice. If you belong to the “more than”, how would you respond to the gospel? If you belong to the “less than” how would you respond to the gospel? The refusal of the “more than” to share to the “less than” is a sin, and the refusal of the “less than” to do the share of deconstructing the sterile and oppressive scheme of things and replacing with a just one is a sin.

Much is expected from these two kinds of people in discerning and obeying God’s will these critical times. The gospel challenges us to respond one way or the other. For a nation to be set free from sins it is not enough to struggle against the domination of the imperial power in the world without exorcising its own evil of feudalistic economy, for it is in this kind of economy that the empire thrives in collaboration with a fascist and corrupt government.

We have just seen history in the making in Tunisia and then in Egypt where people were angry and fought back, putting an end to their presidents’ dictatorship rule which brought massive poverty and oppression.

And God cries out: “How long, O my people?”

The economic exiles heeding the call say: “Where Christians detach themselves from following Christ who frees the captives, finds the lost, heals the sick, liberates the oppressed, upsets religion, and proclaims the year of God’s favor, God of compassion, we know we cannot do everything. But we can do something by pursuing the struggle for migrants’ rights and welfare, supporting various issues that concern us, contributing to the social change in our home countries and standing with the local people and of the world in resisting evils.”

Weave the strands of healing!

This is an announcement and a call to respond to God’s invitation to affirm life amidst death. A realistic hope for our society and Earth today lies with active people resolved to make a difference. Let us continue weaving the strands of healing and go with participating in what God is doing in history.

Every strand is important to the very fabric of God.

Gloria de la Cruz-Hernando

*The Rev. Gloria de la Cruz-Hernando is a pastor
of the United Church of Christ in the Philippines.
She is a mission co-worker with the Presbyterian
Church of the Republic of Korea (PROK) and
Chairs the Togetherness of the Enlightened
Women for Reforms,
Equality, Sustainability and Actions (TERESA)
based in
Seoul, South Korea.*

Listening to God

Recently, the world's attention was on North Africa and the Middle East. People loudly cried out to autocrats and corrupt governments, demanding for justice and change. Several countries' presidents stepped down, were overthrown, including Egypt's. The change in Libya is still on the way; and very bloody.

When the WCC Central Committee decided on the theme of its coming Assembly in Busan, South Korea in 2013, two themes were suggested: on unity, and on justice and peace. After thorough and intense discussions, the Asian voices prevailed and it was very clear: we want justice and peace to be the theme. The chosen theme, "God of life, lead us to justice and peace" reflects the core teaching of Jesus Christ and the need and hope of many Asian countries.

How will justice and change come? It is clear in the Bible that God sent servants to speak for justice and bring forth change. In I Kings 18-19, the Bible recorded how prophet Elijah fought against King Ahab of Israel and the prophets of Baal and brought change to Israel.



At other times, God wishes us to listen to God's call and empower others to do God's will. Photo: 2011 AEC, by Vuluk Lai, Chao-Tsai

Elijah alone successfully defeated the prophets of Baal at Mount Carmel. He was at a peak moment in his life. God worked through him and by him. But after his triumph, he still had to desperately run for his life because Queen Jezebel wanted to kill him. In I Kings 19, God appeared to him and asked him twice, "What are you doing here, Elijah?" He answered repeatedly, "I have been very zealous for the Lord, the God of hosts. For the people of Israel have forsaken your covenant, thrown down your altars, and killed your prophets with the sword, and I, even I only, am left, and they seek my life, to take it away" (I Kings 19:10,14).

In the words of Elijah, one sees his pride (exaggerated self-image) and self-pity. He is the real hero and the one who really cares about the prestige of the Lord. Is it really so? God asked him to go out of the cave and stand on the mountain. There was a strong wind, an earthquake and fire one after another. But God was not in these supernatural phenomena which were often depicted as God's presence. God wanted Elijah to listen carefully to the small whisper. God spoke in a small voice that needed Elijah's attentiveness in order to understand.

Then God gave Elijah new tasks: to anoint new kings of Syria and Israel and Elisha as the successor of Elijah. In other words, the history of Israel came to a transition period. Elijah's job had finished, and he needed to pass his work on to others. Elijah began to realize through this experience and perhaps also through self-examination that God sometimes worked through him, but also through other people even without a name. In reality, God left seven thousand in Israel that had not bowed down to Baal.

If we want to be the servants of God and instruments of peace, we also need to humble ourselves. God wants us to work for justice and peace. At other times, God wishes us to listen to God's call and empower others to do God's will. We all need wisdom to discern God's will. May we all pray as our Lord Jesus taught us, "Your kingdom come, Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven." Amen.

Po, Kam Cheong

The Rev. Po, Kam Cheong is currently the General Secretary of the Hong Kong Christian Council and a member of the CCA Executive Committee for 2010-2015. Rev. Po gave this reflection at the opening worship of the CCA Round Table Meeting on March 3, 2011.

What are you doing here?

In February 2011 a devastating earthquake shook the city and the suburbs of Christchurch. The people of New Zealand confronted the worst disaster in recent history. While the people of Christchurch suffered the whole nation and people abroad experienced pain of loss and death. In times of distress looking at mount Zion the Psalmist cried:

I lift up my eyes to the hills - from where will my help come? My help comes from the Lord, who made heaven and earth (Psalm 121:1-2, NRSV).

But in an earthquake you look up the hills and there you see boulders rolling down. It becomes a frightening scene. We see, read and hear stories unfolding day after day. Many have lost their lives and we do not know how many more will be lost or will remain missing.

Reflecting on this incident brings to mind the instance in which Elijah experienced an earthquake:

*Elijah Meets God at Horeb
He said, 'Go out and stand on the mountain before the Lord, for the Lord is about to pass by.' Now there was a great wind, so strong that it was splitting mountains and breaking rocks in pieces before the Lord, but the Lord was not in the wind; and after the wind an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake; and after the earthquake a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire; and after the fire a sound of sheer silence. When Elijah heard it, he wrapped his face in his mantle and went out and stood at the entrance of the cave. Then there came a voice to him that said, 'What are you doing here, Elijah?' (1 Kings 19:11-13, NRSV)*

God is asking us the same question God asked Elijah, "What are you doing here?" We could answer this question in many ways, but what are we doing amidst the

devastation of today?

We see that people care for one another. In the aftermath of the earthquake the presence of God is felt more in the expression of love and caring for one another. Not only among the people of Christchurch, but the entire nation is coming forward to assist and contribute in whatever way they can. It is in this situation that God's presence is felt more than ever. God is asking each and every one of us: what are you doing here?

The increasing number of natural disasters causes people to face immeasurable suffering and massive displacement. What are you doing amidst this brokenness in God's creation? We have been called by God to do specific tasks. Our answer must be to say "We obey God's call." We are called to be servants to serve the people of God who are in need. We are called to pay attention to places in Asia and throughout the world to care for the people who are displaced.

The support and connections from so many churches and people have been overwhelming. We feel surrounded by prayer. We know that God was not in the earthquake. God is with the people at the relief agencies distributing food and badly needed items. God is with the many people worldwide who have sent prayers and donations. God is with the people struggling to rebuild their lives after the loss of family, friends, and home. God, Emmanuel, is with us.

Let this be our prayer:

Present in the earthquake,
as in the fire and the flood,
not as cause but as companion.
God of life and love
be with those who are suffering
in and around Christchurch.
Wrap them around with hope

and fill them with courage for the days ahead.

Give comfort to the grieving,
and strengthen those who are waiting,
searching, hoping and helping.

Show us how to be agents of healing,
bringing rebuilding and restoration
where there is brokenness,
when the time is right.
in Jesus' name,
Amen.

(Prayer offered by the Uniting Church of Australia)

Prince Devanandan

The Rev. Prince Devanandan is a Methodist Pastor in Aotearoa New Zealand and a member of the CCA General Committee for 2010-2015. He shared this reflection at a morning worship during the CCA General Committee Meeting on March 7-10, 2011.

Bus in ruins in Christchurch.



PRAYER

God, we come before you, longing for words of life.

We've all seen the images of destruction
coming from the lovely city of Christchurch,
and we grieve with our close neighbours
as they endeavour to come to terms with their loss.

We all know there is more, much more suffering in our
world, in many different ways, in many different places.
Queensland still cleaning up after the floods and recovering
from the damage the Yazi brought.

Australia is dealing with the after effects of extreme
weather.

We come to lay at your feet what is too big for us,
what is beyond our comprehension
what we cannot deal with on our own
and we ask for you -

to take it and lift it into your healing presence.

God we come before you,

itching for action, wanting to help.

We rejoice over the help and support pouring
into New Zealand from many corners of the globe.

We are grateful that we, as a community, are able to meet
and pray together that will make a difference.

For the measured, orderly and well organised response that
has saved lives and will support those affected
in months to come.

We offer this our prayer in Jesus' name. Amen.

(Prayer offered by the Uniting Church of Australia)

What can I do?

For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in... (Matthew 25:35 NRSV)

There are so many people who lost their homes.

There are so many people who lost their jobs.

There are so many people who lost their families.

There are so many people who lost their lives.

There are so many people who lost their hope and live in darkness.

Christian Council in Japan (NCCJ) (<http://ncc-support.blogspot.com/>). Of course I am only one of the staff of NCCJ, but I hope to link others through prayer, which is precisely the role of NCCJ.

In concrete terms, RHSB has started to collect information about people who can possibly offer housing and to introduce them to internally displaced persons through our national network of churches and organizations (<http://ncc-support.blogspot.com/>). It is my hope that we can help relieve the pain through this relief work. However, I still ask myself these questions again and again, even after the relief work of RHSB has started:



Earthquake survivors in Minamisanriku, Japan, receive food supplies. Photo: U.S. Navy Mass Communication Specialist Seaman Armando Gonzales.

There are so many people who pray to God in the dark.

There are also many people who pray to God and ask, "What can I do?"

I am also one of these people. Perhaps I can't understand the pain, sorrow, and despair of those who now live in the dark, but I can get closer to them through both my prayers and actions, even if what I can do for them is very limited. This is the reason I decided to assist in establishing the Japan Earthquake Relief Housing Support Blog (RHSB) in the National

What can I do? What must I do?
What can I do? What must I do?

We are now hoping for someone who can continue this urgent work which I was privileged to be a part of in the initial stage.

Zen Koike

Zen Koike is originally from Niigata Prefecture. He is 23 years old, a peace activist, a member of Waseda Church (United Church of Christ in Japan), and is the NCCJ's Relief Housing Coordinator.



Prayer for Japan

Creator of atoms, earth,
fire, water, and air,
We do not understand all
that surrounds us,
We are only a part
and a moment
You are the All in All.

Surround, protect,
and give ground
To our sisters and brothers in Japan.
They feel so afraid
and so abandoned,
Yet we know
You abandon nothing
that you have created,
Nor will you abandon them.

Love us all into the
Larger Life
That Jesus revealed
while being crucified.

With him and for them,
We pray hope.
Amen.

Dr. Richard Rohr

*Japanese apricots blossom in a disaster
area. Photo: Koike Zen*

In special focus

The 2011 Asia Sunday

Every year since 1974, Asia Sunday has been celebrated in Asia and among ecumenical organizations around the world on the Sunday before Pentecost. The observance is to commemorate the founding of the East Asia Christian Conference, renamed in 1973 as the Christian Conference of Asia. This year Asia Sunday falls on 5 June 2011. The theme of Asia Sunday 2011 is *"Make Us Healers, O God."*

The theme is drawn from the CCA 13th General Assembly theme which will run for five years (2011-15), "Called to Prophesy, Reconcile and Heal." The theme is a prayer for us to become healers even as we also pray to be healed of our brokenness and division in our personal and communal life, and in relation to the whole creation.

Please mark 5 June 2011 on your church calendar as Asia Sunday, or designate any Sunday you may prefer. A suggested Worship Resource Guide in pdf is now available online from www.cca.org.hk under Resources.

We request your help in promoting widely this guide in various ways. One way is by sharing this to your member churches. Another is by translating this to your local languages to make it more accessible to the grassroots, and in cooperation with your members.

The Asia Sunday is one way of manifesting our unity as Christians in Asia. It is our humble request that this celebration be coupled with a special offering to be dedicated for the build-up of the CCA Emergency Fund. Kindly refer to our bank details above.

The CCA Emergency Fund

In contexts where churches, councils and communities at-large in Asia become victims due to recurring earthquakes, volcanic eruption, floods, tsunami, etc., CCA deems it important to build an Emergency Fund, keep it on reserve and use it at the right time.

As mandated by the 13th CCA Assembly in April 2010 in Kuala Lumpur, the CCA Emergency Fund was created to enable CCA to:

- Organize immediate visits to see firsthand the damages caused and find out how to assist churches and councils in responding to the emergency situation. The initial visit provides CCA with information to inform the CCA family about the situation so that they can be in solidarity with the affected people and the churches in the countries where the tragedy has taken place.
- Facilitate visits of accompaniment, at times by a small team consisting of members from the CCA family. The

visits aim to assist churches to work out their own relief and rehabilitation work in collaboration with Action by Churches Together (ACT) International or other major donors.

CCA's role is purely accompaniment where it equips and empowers the local churches to be in mission and to respond effectively to the need of the times. The implementors are the local churches and the national councils.

We thus appeal to you to contribute to the CCA Emergency Fund, by sending your contributions to:

Account name: Christian Conference of Asia
Bank: Hang Seng Bank
Branch: Hankow Road (4 Hankow Road,
Kowloon, Hong Kong SAR, China)
Account No.: 295 - 4 - 709594
Account Type: Multi-Currencies Account
Swift Code: HASEHKHH

Healer God, hear us!

Healer God, hear us.
When we call out to you
amidst conflicts and catastrophes,
the pain of being separated from our loved ones,
these fears so profound.
Give us wisdom to understand
The Holiest dwells evermore closer,
transforming our brokenness into wholeness
Make us healers, O God; make us healers of our time.

Healer God, hear us.
When justice seems so silent,
when corruption and ravenous power
creeps in, spreading, consuming.
Turn our deaf ears, blind sight, and our stone hearts
to the realities around us
Stir us, break us, fill us, send us.
Make us healers O God; make us healers of our time.

Healer God, hear us.
when our thoughts scatter,
when we are nothing but empty words,
when we succumb to double standards.
God heal us, forgive us.
Challenge and reignite the flames of living love
Make us healers, O God; make us healers of our time.

*(One line less in each stanza symbolizes the diminution
of 'self' in the calling to becoming healers.)*

Devashrie de Silva

*Devashrie de Silva is a member of the CCA General
Committee from Sri Lanka, for 2010-2015.*

Photo: 2010 AEC, by Stephen Webb