

Christian Conference of Asia

Communiqué

Asian Church Leaders' Conference on Ecumenical Diakonia: Accompaniment, Solidarity, and Participation in God's Mission

"Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfil the law of Christ." (Galatians 6:2)

We, fifty participants representing churches and national councils of churches across Asia, met for the Asian Church Leaders' Conference, convened by the Christian Conference of Asia (CCA), on the theme 'Ecumenical Diakonia: Accompaniment, Solidarity, and Participation in God's Mission'.

Held from 21–24 November 2025 at Payap University, Chiang Mai, Thailand, the conference provided space for reflection on ecumenical diakonia in the Asian context, with deliberations grounded in biblical, theological, and missiological perspectives on diakonia in contemporary Asia.

Beginning with a reflection on the meaning and dimensions of diakonia, participants of the Asian Church Leaders' Conference reiterated that recognising and acknowledging the needy as our neighbour is a lesson taught by Jesus in the parable of the Good Samaritan. The prophets of the Old Testament often spoke as advocates for widows, orphans, and the alien among us (Deuteronomy 10:18-19; Isaiah 1:17). Authentic diakonia involved more than giving money or providing services, or even sharing resources and personnel. It required taking upon oneself the suffering of others and setting aside any sense of self-sufficiency, embracing instead the vulnerability and need of those being served, yet without any sense of superiority (Philippians 2:3-4).

Through a recounting of the history and development of the concept of Ecumenical Diakonia in an Asian context, we were reminded that the principles of ministry and service, expressed as diakonia, and the practice of transformative and prophetic witness of Christ's love, including advocacy, remained at the heart of the Christian message (John 13:14-15). Following Christ authentically, rooted in love, involved serving all God's people in their suffering and brokenness through a ministry that encompassed practising compassion, seeking justice, caring, sharing, healing, and reconciliation.

During the four-day deliberations, we were challenged and inspired to 'reclaim' the concept and context of Ecumenical Diakonia, which had, in recent times, appeared to be in retreat. Tracing the concept of diakonia in Scripture, from both the Old and New Testaments, we were reminded that it lay at the heart of the Christian message (Mark 10:45), highlighting the need for a fresh understanding and renewed expressions of diakonia that embrace sacrificial service, social justice, and the empowerment of the marginalised as essential expressions of God's mission in the world (Luke 4:18-19). In this regard, diakonia is not an optional extra or a secondary ministry, but an integral part of Christian discipleship. It is incumbent upon all churches, not merely the responsibility of specialised agencies or organisations. Reclaiming diakonia as a missional mandate requires moving beyond emergency relief and acts of compassion to embrace a transformative and prophetic role in the world.

The five thematic plenary sessions further enabled us to explore the understanding and practice of Ecumenical Diakonia. Voices from different parts of Asia shared diverse experiences and challenges in

diakonal ministry, as well as their various engagements with communities in crisis. The thematic presentations and subsequent discussions helped us identify several shared insights and affirmations.

A renewed transition in the understanding of Christian charity was noted, shifting from a purely philanthropic activity to a profound expression of service to fellow human beings (1 John 3:17-18) and to the nature embodied in the concept of diakonia. We affirmed that diakonia represents the outward manifestation of Christian faith and therefore differs fundamentally from ordinary social service. As faith enacted in love, diakonia encompasses social service, advocacy, and collaborative engagement aimed at transforming unjust structures and fostering peace, hope, and reconciliation. Authentic diakonia calls individuals and institutions to nurture communities rooted in solidarity, compassion, and responsible stewardship (1 Peter 4:10). Just as the liturgy celebrates faith, diakonia finds its origin and interconnectedness within the liturgical life of the Church, continuing as an extension of that celebration expressed through acts of service beyond the altar. In this sense, diakonia is rightly understood as “Liturgy after the Liturgy,” carrying the spiritual experience of worship into daily life through acts of service, mission, and love in the world.

While listening to the realities and experiences of Asian churches and their diakonal engagements in their respective contexts, we benefited tremendously from the deeper exposure to the circumstances, challenges, and opportunities highlighted, especially given that Christianity remains a minority religion in all Asian countries except the Philippines and Timor-Leste. We were particularly struck by the breadth of ecumenically-led diakonal ministry and witness extended by Asian churches in their local and national contexts to diverse communities in need, and by the churches’ participation in addressing a wide range of issues across Asia. The sharing of experiences and engagement in diakonia reminded us to reiterate our commitment to affirm that “diakonia is not a charity project; it is a way of life.”

The need to focus the Asian churches’ diakonal mission in multiple areas was underscored: to identify with and accompany the most vulnerable, including the poor, persons with disabilities, indigenous communities, internally displaced persons, refugees and asylum-seekers, and those threatened by climate injustice and ecological imbalance, acknowledging that diakonia does not always remove suffering but often involves sharing in the pain and walking alongside the afflicted. The challenges facing children and youth, as well as the growing geriatric crisis in many ageing societies in Asia, were also identified as urgent areas warranting Asian ecumenical diakonia.

The Conference affirmed that diakonia must aim to ensure justice, human dignity, sustainable social transformation, and the empowerment of marginalised communities within a landscape of intentional inclusivity and interdependence (1 Corinthians 12:24-26). It also underscored the importance of integrity, leadership, and stewardship in the implementation of diakonal ministry, supported by professionalism, transparency, and accountability in the use of funds and resources at all levels. At every stage of the deliberations, the Conference reiterated the essence of the Church’s ministry of diakonia, which stands firmly on three foundational pillars: accompaniment, walking with communities in humility and compassion; solidarity, identifying with and sharing in the suffering of others; and participation, empowering grassroots communities to actively shape their own futures and their role in God’s mission.

We closed the conference by committing ourselves afresh to upholding these pillars in thought, word, and deed. We affirmed our responsibility to carry back to our organisations, home churches, and communities the imperative to deepen the theological understanding of diakonia, broaden the Church’s reach in tending to human needs, and walk the extra mile in transforming inequitable and unjust structures within society. This includes heightened engagement with governments, decision-makers, thought-leaders, and

community organisers, while remaining consistent and focused on the ministry and service to God's creation, for which diakonia is the outpouring of His love.

The Conference reaffirmed the Church's enduring capacity and potential to carry out effective diakonia, countering pessimistic perceptions that it is neither proactive nor prophetic in its mission, as well as repeated accusations that churches are inefficient in implementing diakonal ministry. While non-governmental organisations may cease their work when external funding ends, the Church's diakonal service continues through the steadfast commitment of its faithful members.

The Conference welcomed the decision of the General Assembly and the Executive Committee of the Christian Conference of Asia to assist Asian churches in enhancing their capacities for diakonal ministry and to facilitate the creation of a platform for information sharing, networking, and mutual support in times of need, particularly for the ecumenical sharing of resources among CCA member churches. CCA's initiative to establish the Ecumenical Diakonia Network in Asia (EDNA), aimed at supporting churches across Asia to better utilise their resources for diakonia and to strengthen inter-church networking on the continent, was affirmed as a priority for reinforcing the diakonal ministry of Asian churches. As part of the commitment to support ongoing ministry and enhance capacities for effective engagement, the Conference encouraged the development of improved models of cooperation between Asian churches. We hope that the EDNA initiative of CCA will strengthen the capacities of Asian churches to carry out their diakonal ministries effectively and with appropriate coordination across the region.

We are reminded: "Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfil the law of Christ." (Galatians 6:2)

Chiang Mai, Thailand

24 November 2025