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# cca news



## Crisis, Christmas and Peace

## IN THIS ISSUE

### Global Currents

Pakistan Churches Call for Peace	3
Open Letter to George W. Bush	4
September 11 Aftermath in Asia	6

### CCA in Focus

Historic Visit to North Korea	8
Asia Religious Educators Forum	9
Peacemaking and Conflict Resolution	14
Consultation on Social Advocacy	16
Development Management Training	17
HIV/AIDS Consultation	19
Consultation on Children's Rights	19
Visit to Indochina	20
Wong Wai Ching	21
Roundtable Meetings	22
Asia Ecumenical Course	23

### Reflection

24

### Farewell

26

### Newsbriefs

28

### Obituary: T.K. Thomas

30

### Feature: NCCA

32

Cover: "Seeking Refuge" by Segar  
(Sri Lanka)

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## A CHRISTMAS MESSAGE

And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us.

(John 1:14)

In the midst of our insecurity, instability and vulnerability, Christmas comes once again as a sign of hope that God will bring about 'fullness of life for all'. During the past year here in Asia, we experienced the continuation of the economic crisis, the increase in unemployment and underemployment, the spread of the HIV/AIDS pandemic, the continuation of communal violence and human rights abuses, the rise in fundamentalist militancy, the push to militarism, the continuation of dictatorial regimes, the increasing influx of displaced peoples and refugees and the increasing disregard of their human rights by many countries, to name just a few of these human tragedies.

Most of these problems have affected our Asian region for some time now. But the recent events following the September 11 attacks in the USA have further escalated them. Since the problem of terrorism has long been brewing all over the world, what happened on September 11 is merely an eruption of the problem. It brought to us the realisation that globalisation has not only made the world a little economic village but that war has also become truly borderless.

We are therefore reminded of the first Christmas when the Christ child was born in the midst of similar conflicts of poverty, bondage and oppression in concrete economic, political, and cultural terms. We remember how the family of Jesus experienced the vulnerability of life as refugees, threatened by poverty and by the powers that be.

Yet, the message of Christmas is that it was in such a seemingly hopeless time as theirs that God sent Jesus in order that people might have life, 'life in its fullness'.

And so our prayer is that we will experience once again, this Christmas season and throughout the New Year, the hope that God's will for life in its fullness will truly come about. This is what it means to be the church in Asia—that because we are partakers of this hope, we cannot afford to be mere bystanders and onlookers. We are called to be agents of repentance of the hatred, intolerance and enmity that characterise human relationships. We are also called to be agents of the birthing of God's will. Hence, we are called to continue being present where our Asian people suffer and hurt most and to participate in ministries of peacemaking and justice-seeking.

I am telling you the truth: whoever believes in me  
will do what I do—yes, they will do even greater things.

(John 14:12)

*Jennifer Dawson, President*

*Anthony Row, President*

*Israel Paulraj, Honorary Treasurer*

*Wong Wai Ching, President*

*Joseph Mar Irenaeus, President*

*Ahn Jae Woong, General Secretary*

# War Is Not the Answer

Urgent call from Pakistan churches for peace, not war

**T**he General Secretary of the National Council of Churches in Pakistan, Victor Azariah, has called on the world community to seek peace at this time and to stop the war in Afghanistan. 'Peace is the most important thing,' he said in Hong Kong on 19 October. 'War is not the answer to this political problem. Negotiation and respect for each other's rights is vital. Churches in Pakistan have supported the government of Pakistan in letter and spirit in the desire to eliminate terrorism, together with the international community. But they also feel that attacking and killing innocent people in Afghanistan is extremely unwise and should be immediately stopped.'

'Many people in Pakistan and the international community question Americans: "What is the crime of the people of Afghanistan, the vast majority of whom do not have the least idea about this sophisticated terrorism committed by someone in the US?"', he said. 'Whether bombing and other acts of war are deliberately directed to civilians, the reality is that civilians are being hit and made homeless through war, which is a one-sided act by the superpowers.'

By way of background, Victor stated that 'Russia, during the Cold War, decided to take over Afghanistan, wanting a warm-water port and military advantage. The Americans and Europeans did not like this and used the



Afghans to fight Russia. Since the Afghans are staunch Muslims, they were made to believe that the non-believers should be pushed back from Afghanistan. For that reason they supported the Americans and were trained and armed by them, as well as by Pakistan and Saudi Arabia. Millions died during that war and more than 5 million were rendered shelterless. They took refuge mainly in Pakistan and Iran. While the international community

*We call on the  
Christian community  
to assist with the  
relief effort, to  
advocate peace and  
an end to this war*

helped during that war, as soon as the military objective of defeating the Russians was accomplished, much of that help was withdrawn.'

Victor reflected, 'The Muslim world is very uneasy, because an attack on Afghanistan is regarded as an attack on Islam. Religious parties and Islamic fundamentalists in Pakistan, Indonesia, Malaysia, Nigeria and even Thailand are protesting over the killing of innocent people. Of course it is not true that this is a war between Islam and Christianity, but the use by President Bush of the word "crusade" has been exploited by the Islamist groups.'

The situation of Muslims in other countries is also being given close attention in Pakistan. 'We are very much aware of the situation of the Palestinians. People feel connected to the Palestinian issue. To see TV coverage of homes being bulldozed in Palestine and mothers crying really upsets people, who feel that Muslim people in that area are being so badly treated. There is an urgent need for a peaceful, political solution to that problem and implementation of existing United Nations resolutions. Similarly, the situation of Iraqi civilians is widely seen as callous disregard of the ordinary human needs of Muslim people.'

'There is much suspicion in Pakistan as to whether the US has other reasons than locating Bin Laden for the level of military assault on Afghanistan. Is it a place to test modern weapons?

## An Open Letter to President George W. Bush

*President of the United States of America*

Dear President Bush:

On behalf of the Christian Conference of Asia, an ecumenical organisation based in Hong Kong, we would like to convey our deepest sympathy to the families of the victims of the hijacking attacks in the US last September 11. We feel very deeply with all the American people and other affected nationals as you all grieve the loss of innocent lives, including the lives of the rescue workers who had put their own lives at risk in the course of their duty.

In our grief and solidarity with you, we strongly condemn such a heinous crime against humanity, even as we condemn all forms of violence against any people, nation or community.

As an ecumenical organisation comprising 121 member churches and national councils of churches from eighteen Asian countries, with a membership of more than 55 million individuals, we strongly believe that suffering at any level by anyone anywhere must be overcome. Our faith always reminds us that God sent to the

world the Christ so that everyone might have the 'fullness of life'.

Aware of the many forms of violence that continue to be faced by the peoples of Asia, the Christian Conference of Asia has affirmed our ecumenical mission of proclaiming in word and deed the saving will of God for fullness of life for all. As a concrete form of this proclamation, we have committed ourselves to the work of 'cultivating the culture of peace' as a way of overcoming violence. We made this commitment early this year in the wake of the violence that continues to plague many parts of Asia—due to injustice and poverty, to ethnic and religious enmity, to political and cultural rivalries and to senseless power struggles and the arms race.

It is in this spirit that we appeal to you, the US government and all its allies, including a number of governments from Asia, to prayerfully think of how best to deal with the situation that has been created following the September 11 incident.

We who have lived in a violence-ridden region like Asia know how the cycle of violence can only breed more violence. We also know what it is like when a politically or economically motivated war is turned into a religious

Is there a desire to dominate and gain access to the rich mineral and oil reserves of Central Asia?

'Ironically,' said Victor, 'within Afghanistan the Taliban has gained in popularity amongst the people because of the military action by the Americans and their allies. It is premature to predict that any installed government could control the situation. Only time will tell. The history of the Afghan people is that they are very strong fight-

ers, fiercely independent, used to wheeling and dealing, shifting tribal alliances and linkages with the outside world and to their own fairly harsh terrain.'

Christians are doing all they can to assist the refugees. 'We are mobilising the Christian community to extend every assistance to refugees. The main groups willing and able to assist the refugees are NGOs and churches. Only Pakistanis are able to get into the refu-

gee camps. We call on the Christian community internationally to assist with the relief effort, but it is even more important to advocate peace and an end to this war. That should be our first and main priority, so that people can go home'.

Pakistani Christians are also actively engaged with interfaith discussions with Muslims. Victor said: 'This is vital for social harmony and understanding. The Christian community in

war. Until now, we continue to live with this problem here in Asia. We therefore need to clarify that this is not a war of religions or of civilisations. We also must understand what it is like to feel real anger and rage at injustice, suffering and oppression.

In solidarity with you, we want to share with you our own hard-earned lesson: to carefully understand the real roots of the problem. What very often lies beneath 'terrorism' or 'fundamentalism' is a deep anger or rage resulting from a deep sense of threat or exclusion as well as long exposure to violence itself. It is amazing to know that a number of suicide bombers in some Asian countries are actually orphans whose parents were killed in previous violent experiences. We particularly note that the situations of the Palestinians and Iraqi civilians, and especially the aspiration of the Palestinians for a clearly Palestinian state, are in need of urgent attention by the international community.

We do not support any call for military war, whether through strikes by air, land or sea. We are in fact concerned about how your call for support from other governments can further excite communal violence in many Asian countries along religious and communal lines. Even as there are talks about 'proportionate response', we know that Afghanistan and several Asian countries are already ravaged by years of war and are still trying to survive. It is very clear that any course of action you will decide on will drastically affect Asian peoples. And so we ask that even as you consider the human rights of the thousands who were killed on September 11, it is

also important to seriously consider the human rights of the Afghan and other Asian peoples. We are particularly concerned about the people of Pakistan, including the Christians who are a minority there, who seem to be caught in the middle of all this.

Military retaliation will not be the best way to deal with the September 11 attacks. It may be the response expected of a powerful nation like the United States. It may also be the expected response of a group of people who are ready to die and would not mind others dying with them in the process. But the real proof of power is in how the United States, and all countries in solidarity with her, can learn and live out the hard way of genuine peace with justice.

It is time that we all begin to think of security not in terms of the usual 'national security' concept which is ensured by military might and arms capability. If we are to hold this one world together, we need to work for a 'common security and universal prosperity' for all—ensured by the meeting of people's most basic needs for food and land, for respect of their civil and political rights and their basic human aspirations. We must join hands to attain this common security of peace, mutual understanding and goodwill to all.

Our prayer remains: 'Give peace a chance.'  
Very sincerely,

*Ahn Jae Woong*  
*General Secretary*  
*4 October 2001*

Pakistan always feels a backlash when something goes against Pakistan at the behest of the West. Sometimes Pakistani Christians are considered stooges of the West, which we are not. So we have met Muslim dignitaries and tried to assist them to understand the way we view things. We are Pakistani Christians. We love our country and are loyal citizens of our own country.

'We wonder what will happen when military objectives are accomplished.

Before September 11, US military equipment supplies were suspended, membership of the Commonwealth was suspended and there was great pressure for elections coming from the West. After September 11, suddenly increased aid was promised, special grants made and the IMF visited. But once this offensive is over, Pakistan may be in the same position as before.'

The Christian Conference of Asia, a fellowship of over 120 churches

and member councils of churches throughout the region, urges Christians and all others of goodwill to actively work and pray for peace. Said Dr Ahn Jae Woong, General Secretary of Christian Conference of Asia, 'We need to move from being bystanders to realising that we make a difference and do whatever we can towards long-term peace, understanding and stability for all.'

—*Mandy Tibbey*

# September 11 Aftermath in Asia



## Pakistan

Following the United States' air strikes on Afghanistan beginning on 4 October the environment of religious intolerance in a number of Asian countries became even more 'highly charged'.

In Bahawalpur, in the Punjab province of Pakistan, masked gunmen attacked the St Dominic's Roman Catholic Church on 28 October as Sunday service was being conducted by Pastor Emmanuel Allah Ditta of the Church of Pakistan. Participants of the 100-member Protestant congregation were singing the closing hymn of their Sunday service at this Catholic church, which they use for their services, when unidentified gunmen sprayed bullets indiscriminately. As a result, seventeen worshippers were killed and around thirty others were injured, including women and children.

While the National Council of Churches in Pakistan has supported the Pakistani government's decision to join the international coalition to fight terrorism, it has asked that a judicial inquiry be made so that those found guilty of this heinous act can be brought to justice.

Although no group has claimed responsibility for the incident, Christian leaders expressed that their fears that continued US attacks on Afghanistan would expose Christians to greater risk have indeed come true. They thought it likely that the massacre was an act of 'revenge' by militant Islamic groups that think that Christians are supporters of America.



## India

In the wake of the current scare about terrorism, the Indian government plans to curb the flow of foreign

funds to organisations in India in order to cut off financing of terrorist groups from outside sources. Christian groups are concerned that such a plan could threaten legitimate Christian and other organisations that may be unpopular with the government.

Ipe Joseph, general secretary of the National Council of Churches in India (NCCI)—composed of twenty-nine Orthodox and Protestant churches—expressed great concern about this plan for if the laws became more stringent 'government officials could create trouble for Christian action groups and even churches'.



## Malaysia

Churches in Malaysia have been under attack following the US-led military attacks on Afghanistan. The latest of a series of arson attempts on Christian churches took place on 27 October, when extremists set ablaze the Christ Community Centre Church in Subang Jaya. A fortnight before this, extremists attempted to torch the Catholic Church of Christ the King in Sungai Petani, in the northern state of Kedah, home state of Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad.

In a separate attack, Molotov cocktails were thrown at St Philip's Catholic Centre on 14 October in Segamat in the southern state of Johore. Fortunately, most of the Molotov cocktails failed to explode and only the door was damaged.

Fears of growing Islamic extremism are shared by neighbouring countries such as Singapore, Indonesia and the Philippines. Using religion to ignite hatred, the growing number of Islamic militants could potentially destabilise the whole region. Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad has previously warned of a network of extremists in the region that is bent on establishing a union of Islamic governments in Malaysia, Indonesia and the Philippines.



### Japan

In Japan, an Interreligious Prayer Gathering for Peace was jointly organised on 25 September by the National Council of Churches in Japan, the Catholic Council for Peace and Justice and a number of Buddhist groups. It was held at the Komyoji temple. Also invited were people from the Islamic faith. Part of the service was a walk to the American Embassy to pay tribute to the September 11 victims by giving flowers.



### Korea

Following the September 11 attacks in the US, the Korean Association of Women Theologians (KAWT) called on the Bush Administration to take a step back from the heated rhetorics of Americentricism, carefully look into the causes of this conflict and humbly ask for wisdom in solving the problem. 'The United States must ask if the basis for this tragedy does not lie in its overt belief in its status as the world's sole superpower and its flagrant violations of the Kyoto Agreement and the Missile Defence Treaty. Only when the United States addresses these issues, will it be able to find a peaceful means to a solution,' their statement said.

The group described the US foreign policies based on 'the degrees of cooperation made by its allies' as another form of terrorism akin to using small nations as pawn for its own game. The group expressed support for Barbara Lee (Democrat, California), who voted against the resolution for declaring war against the terrorists in the US House of Representatives. Although numerically insignificant, 'this vote will go a long way towards uniting the women of the world who desire for and work towards peace'.

Some thirty-six women's organisations, including Women Making Peace, came up with a 'Peace Flier Campaign' calling for the suspension of terrorism and war in favour of peaceful resolution of differences. 'We believe the causes of terrorist acts and wars originate from hatred and thoughts of revenge. Therefore, we should punish terrorists on the one hand and look for peaceful means to reduce or eliminate hatred and vengeful thoughts on the other,' they stated.



### Australia

In Australia, a group of Jewish, Muslim and Christian leaders met on 14 September and issued a joint statement, 'A Time to Stand Together', out of compassion for those whose lives have been tragically affected and to affirm their shared commitment to peace and human dignity. 'We call on members of our three faith communities to respond to the terrible events by strengthening the ties of faith and mutual respect that bind us together. Our compassion for the victims and our horror at the inhumane deeds must not become an excuse for hatred or bigotry or be exploited by those who seek to divide us on the basis of religion or ethnic origin.'

At this time of the Muslim holy season of Ramadan and the Christian season of Advent, the World Council of Churches, through the General Secretary Konrad Raiser, sent a letter of solidarity to the heads of Muslim religious communities throughout the world. 'As Christians, we reject the tendency, not uncommon in many Western countries, to perceive Muslims as a threat and to portray Islam in negative terms while projecting a positive self-image.' The WCC also sent a letter to the member churches asking them to seek the most appropriate ways to engage with their Muslim partners in acts of spiritual fellowship and prayer for peace and justice. Some Christian leaders have responded by joining in the religious festival of Ramadan through fasting, prayer, reflection and seeking forgiveness and strength.

# Historic Visit to North Korea

Improving ecumenical relations with the Korean Christian Federation

In cooperation with the World Alliance of Reformed Churches and the World Council of Churches, the Christian Conference of Asia made a historic visit to North Korea on 15–18 September.

The delegation consisted of Ahn Jae Woong and Tony Waworuntu from CCA, and Park Seong Won and Lee Seong Hei from the WARC.

Rev. Kang Yong Sop, chairman of the Central Committee of the Korean Christian Federation, extended the invitation to visit North Korea.

The visit included sharing on mutual ecumenical cooperation, worship at Bongsu Church and Chilgol Church and a visit to Raknang House Church in Pyongyang, plus a visit to the Bongsu



Above: Chilgol Church

Left: Bongsu Church



noodle factory, which produces 3 tons of noodles a day for the needy.

There are two churches at present in North Korea, Bongsu and Chilgol, and over 500 house churches throughout the country. The KCF claims more than 12,000 members.

One concrete suggestion offered to the KCF to improve ecumenical cooperation with Asian Christian communities is for Rev. Kang Yong Sop to lead a delegation to visit Hong Kong in spring 2002 and then to visit Jakarta and New Delhi as part of a wider exposure.

# Asia Religious Educators Forum

Religious education in Asia: challenges, perspectives and visions in the twenty-first century

The Christian Conference of Asia launched the Asia Religious Educators Forum (AREF) by gathering thirty key religious educators in Asia on 8–14 October 2001 in Chiang Mai, Thailand, on the theme 'Religious Education in Asia: Challenges, Perspectives and Visions in the Twenty-first Century'. This was hosted by the Department of Christian Education of the Church of Christ in Thailand. As a new CCA initiative, AREF is a venue for conversations of educators in religion—those trained in and practitioners of Christian education or religious education in churches, seminaries and church-related schools. Its goal is to determine directions and ways by which religious educators in Asia can journey together in promoting the process of learning within churches, seminaries and church-related schools, informing and guiding people in the movement of seeking the visible unity of Christians, guided by the Holy Spirit, as well as seeking openness to learning with people of other faiths.

In this initial forum, the religious educators started with their stories and trailblazing efforts, shared, analysed and reflected on the issues and challenges that they are facing in the present Asian context, brought about by new realities of life both regionally and globally, reflected on the ecumenical and global perspectives that help sharpen our understanding and practice of religious education, identified the emerging trends in religious/Christian education, and envisioned new direction for religious education in Asia in the twenty-first century. They drew inspiration from each other through participant-led worship, Bible studies and discussions, from the resources of our faith heritage and culture, from resource persons and from encounter with visited communities.

Dr Kim Yong Bock, Chancellor of the Advanced Institute for the Study of Life, spoke on 'Globalisation: Emerging Issues and Challenges to Religious Education in Asia'. Rev. Simon Oxley, Coordinator of the World Council of Churches Education and Ecumenical Formation Team, sent his paper on 'Ecumenical Perspective in Religious Education: Looking Back, Looking Forward', which was introduced by Ms Edna Orteza, a participant who was formerly on the staff of the WCC. Dr Hope Antone, CCA Consultant for Communication, led in the visioning through a Bible study on 'learning with the other' and an input on contextual Asian religious education that is responsive to the plurality of Asia, entitled 'An Invitation to the Table Community'.

—Cora Tabing-Reyes





**E**ducation is a kind of cultural action for the sharing of life-wisdom in community. In the Asian traditions, this sharing of wisdom about life was passed down through the generations in households, religious communities and societies. Following the commercial and colonial penetration of the Western powers, however, Western education has become dominant among Asian people.

Modern (Western) education is not only an integral part of the modern state, but it occupies all the public space for education in schools and societies. Moreover, in recent years the high-tech mass media has taken a prominent role in cultural inter-action, which is a new form of cultural action. Traditionally, education has served the ruling classes. In modern times it has also served the nation states. The dominant elites have dictated the system of education for the people. In the context of globalisation, education has been transformed to serve the global market according to the dictates of the 'principalities and powers' (transnational corporations, banks, nation states, the World Trade Organisation, IMF, World Bank). Furthermore, not only is education serving the global market but also the market is making education into a commodity in the global market.

- People are subjects of cultural action. Cultural action means that people are rising as the conscious subjects of their life and they are appropriating and creating the wisdom and beauty of life out of their

experiences in the universe. This kind of cultural action is opposed to any domination of the minds and hearts of the people through cultural suppression or control. The awakening of people as subjects of their life is their conscientisation. Education and cultural action mean conscientisation.

- Cultural action involves resistance against the powers and principalities of the market. Cultural action is an ideological criticism. It exposes money and power in terms of their ideological claims, whether these are expressed through commercial advertising or political propaganda. Cultural action liberates people and life from the silence and suppression imposed by the ideologies of market powers.
- Cultural action is the search for a vision of life that is beautiful and full. This means that education is the realisation of a vision of life with creativity and imagination. Therefore, creative alternatives should be found to liberate education from its oppressive and dominating institutions through their radical transformation. It is also important to find open and creative space for creative cultural action and education. Religious communities and other public spaces should be open to such creativity.
- Faith-based cultural actions are a special privilege of Asian peoples. We have a rich historical reservoir of wisdom for life, through our peoples' experiences. While the universe is the womb of life, peoples' experiences are the womb of the wisdom of life.

## Religious Education as an Invitation to a Table Community



Hope S. Antone

**T**he table image struck me as a very powerful image for doing religious education in such a plural context as Asia because of what it symbolises in many of our cultures:

- Mealtable sharing is the best symbol of warm hospitality—a lavishly or simply set table is naturally inviting.
- In some indigenous communities, mealtable sharing is very open and inclusive.
- It is a natural place for sharing and communion.
- It is a symbol of reconciliation and peacemaking.
- It symbolises freedom—in our ways of eating, our choices of food etc.
- It represents a sharing of gratefulness and a celebration of joy.
- It represents a vision, a hope and a dream—for others' wellbeing.
- The food that is shared together is also associated with theology and spirituality.

The Bible is also full of food and eating images. In the Bible, food talk is God talk. Food is a means of communication. Sharing of food is a symbol of intimacy, of building serious and significant relationships, including the healing of rifts. It is also associated with ethics of sharing and of hospitality to the stranger and the enemy. Of course, as the identity of the early biblical people became more associated with the rituals and laws about purity and cleanliness, the table image became more exclusive. Hence, Jesus had to break down the rigid table manners that were centred on the purity law in order to make the table open once again to all and

for all. Still, as Christians came to follow Jesus, the table of the Lord's Supper has once again become a symbol of exclusion, separation and division, even within Christianity.

In spite of what has become of our mealtable practices today—they have become exclusive and selective—I still believe that it is worth retrieving some of the positive elements about mealtable sharing and the community that is built, nurtured and sustained through it. By table community, I mean a community that is built around common needs and aspirations, that shares the gifts of life and that serves each other. It is not a community that is made to be in uniformity.

Rather, it is a community of communities—whose differences are accepted and affirmed, whose desire is to mutually learn from each other and work together for the sake of the common good, common security, common prosperity.

What has mealtable sharing to do with religious education in Asia? For me, mealtable sharing provides the related images of an open invitation and lavish hospitality for the sake of the other. It represents a deep mutual sharing and honest communion that addresses a most human need: for food and life. It symbolises an act of peacemaking and reconciliation so needed in our time. It offers an exercise in freedom and solidarity, a partaking of a vision as well as a celebration of true communion or community. These I believe are the important elements of religious education that uses religious pluralism as an approach to religious plurality in a region such as Asia.

## Christian Responses to Religious Plurality

First, there is the exclusivist response: our own community, our tradition, our understanding of reality, our encounter with God, is the one and only truth, excluding all others. Second, there is the inclusivist response: There are, indeed, many communities, traditions and truths, but our own way of seeing things is the culmination of the others, superior to others, or at least wide enough to include the others under our universal canopy and in our own terms. A third response is that of the pluralist: Truth is not the exclusive or inclusive possession of any one tradition or community. Therefore the diversity of communities, traditions and understandings of the truth, and visions of God is not an obstacle for us to overcome, but an opportunity for our energetic engagement and dialogue with one another. It does not mean giving up our commitments; rather, it means opening up those commitments to the give-and-take of mutual discovery, understanding, and, indeed, transformation.

—*Diana L. Eck, in her book Encountering God: A Spiritual Journey from Bozeman to Banaras (Boston: Beacon Press, 1993), p. 168*

## AREF: A Brief Report

**W**e are thirty women and men, Christian religious educators from thirteen countries of Asia with varied experiences derived from our engagement in the life of local parishes, church institutions, theological seminaries and church-related schools.

- We have come to affirm our common calling as religious educators, to share our stories of life and work, our hopes and dreams; to explore new ways of teaching and learning; to make connections, build community and draw inspiration from each other.
- We have come offering our gifts in music, poetry, art, liturgy, writing, teaching, facilitating, documenting, reporting—skills developed through years of extensive work among children, young people, women and men, school directors, college presidents, church leaders, Dalits, Tamils, Maori, Aborigines, indigenous peoples in Burma, Thailand, Taiwan, and the Philippines.
- We affirmed and celebrated our common ‘spirituality for life’ through sharing our journeys, our struggles and life-stories. Listening to each one, we realised that each of us is a story, even as we have a common **story** to share with others. Each story reminds us of our context, which in turn shapes our passion and compassion through the ministry of religious education.
- As we explored our common journey as educators, we affirmed that it would be helpful to clarify a vision of education. Our shared hope

is to emerge as a movement of people, a movement of educators sharing a new vision, founded on ecumenical spirituality inspired by Jesus Christ, the greatest teacher.

- Part of our common story is the unique context of Asia with its diversity of peoples, cultures, languages and religions; realities of poverty, injustice, powerlessness and marginalisation of many; problems resulting from fundamentalism, ethnic and religious rivalries, power and the arms race.
- We live in a world that is becoming more integrated into a uniform, hegemonic system controlled by imperial powers and principalities, which put the economy, the military, the whole spectrum of science and technology as integral parts of a global industrial civilisation. It is based on limitless competition, breaking all legal limits and respecting no-one, which results in further divisions and conflicts among peoples and nations. It renders nation states as inadequate instruments for political governance and national sovereignty. Indeed, no stone is left untouched by this complex and amorphous enemy: globalisation.
- We recognise the enormous problems brought about by globalisation; and that many people have preconceived ideas about the ‘otherness’ of large sectors in society, which adds more pain to existing differences. This calls for greater responsibilities in ways that include healing and reconciliation.

- In such a context, we struggle to retell our common Faith Story of God's will for 'fullness of life for all' as shown in the life and ministry of our model teacher, Jesus Christ. We realise that this involves the dismantling of colonial influences in our thinking, our methods, our ways of doing education, especially education in religion.
- We celebrate and affirm our struggles:
  - for genuine contextual and cross-cultural education,
  - for creative and participatory learning and teaching,
  - for more meaningful inter-faith and gender inclusive collaboration,
  - for dialogue,
  - for peace and reconciliation,
  - for unity in diversity,
  - for the transformation of individuals, churches and societies.
- We believe that life is not an object of mathematical computation, scientific exploration or genetic manipulation. But the global industrial civilisation has masterminded the most effective means of destroying life through nuclear and biochemical warfare.
- If we affirm life. We affirm that life is sovereign. When life is sovereign, then we affirm that God is sovereign.
- The crisis of Christian education is that churches are not capable of responding to the challenges of globalisation. But, when we begin to talk about life, we are already responding to globalisation.
  - The Bible itself can be a book of power for life. It speaks about the Word of Life. It speaks about Je-

sus Christ as the Life of the World.

It speaks about the fullness of life for all and promises life abundant.

It is life that cannot be destroyed.

–Asian peoples have wisdom for life. The Christian faith can be strengthened in Asia by popular historic religious traditions. In plural contexts, it is important to use shared elements in the culture, e.g. concepts of neighbourhood and community, festivals such as harvest or the festival of lights. Shared symbols and meanings are drawn from shared culture and from the life and work of the people in a community. Sometimes a shared culture precedes religious differences and provides a shared ground (origin, derivation, location, or place).

- Education is about wisdom for life, where people are the subjects of experience. To do Christian education is to be radically critical, to resist any modernistic approach that controls not only people, but also time and space. To do Christian education is to challenge the forces of death, for people to experience the liberating aspect of education and find a world that is filled with beauty and joy, love and compassion.
- Education is about addressing historical injustice, redeeming activity and concern for justice for all creation. It gives children and youth life and liberation from the power of death. It takes into account intergenerational needs, people and not books as the 'textbooks' and that our story is formed in community.
- Education values sound praxis,

contextual theological development and rich spirituality. It encourages the realisation of self and the realisation of the reign or 'kingdom' of God. It inspires courage, persistence, faithfulness and a willingness to walk and work alongside the other as essential elements. It suggests that religion is about paying attention to God, the sacred, self, other and creation and that fundamental to the teaching-learning process are the desires to change power to pathos and to make experiential 'the Word: I am with you'.

- A main concern for Christian education is how to put Jesus Christ in the centre of life. An important task in education is to enable those with whom we work to find their name for and understanding of their God and what they hold as sacred. This implies revisiting, reclaiming, and restoring cultural, social and moral heritage. Liturgical life is the context and content for religious education. Worship is not simply a ritual but a 'living together experience'.
- In recent years, there has been a paradigm shift in theological education. There is a movement from dogma to life, which has found expression in many forms—field education, immersion, community research, community projects—programs and activities that allow for deeper engagement in the realities surrounding people's lives.
- The family is the basic unit for Christian education. It is the task of the church to enable families to take up this responsibility. They recognise that the shape of the family has radically changed in recent

years and ask: 'What constitutes family today and what shape does enabling need to take?' Sunday school classes need review. Should age categories be used? How can interaction between generations be encouraged and enabled? How can church members learn from each other? What is our vision of education and what constitutes and shapes that vision?

- We have come to realise that a truly ecumenical vision of the whole world as God's household should guide our work and passion of education in religion. This calls for a new orientation:

*Pluralism towards Difference, Otherness or Plurality*

We need to guard against too exclusivist and too inclusivist stances, which can actually mean religious arrogance or imperialism

to others. We can model a pluralist approach, which is committed to one's own faith commitment but open to learning from and with those of other faith commitments.

*From Christian Education to Religious Education*

As Christian educators, we need to continue education in the 'first language' of our Christian faith. But as Asian Christian educators, we also need to move on to the 'second language' of religious education—which is the language of conversation and dialogue with other Asian religions.

*From Traditional Mission Orientation to Contemporary Mission Perspectives*

Since we are Christians, mission is at the heart of our life and work as educators. However, we need to

move from the goal of conversion (i.e. proselytism) to healing and reconciliation, from the need to become the majority to being content with being the minority (e.g. salt, yeast and mustard seed) and from being caught up with doctrinal issues to being concerned about deep spiritual concerns.

- We are conscious that we, Asian Christian educators, are just a few of the many religious educators in Asia. Our hope is that we can begin to reach out to other Asian religious educators at local, national and regional levels, and work in partnership for the promotion of the 'fullness of life for all' through an ecumenical religious education for life.
- We have pledged to continue our networking, exchange, and sharing even after this first AREF and we look forward to AREF in 2003.

# Peacemaking and Conflict Transformation



**F**rom 30 September through 4 October sixteen representatives from the Philippines, Hong Kong, Thailand, Nagaland and Indonesia gathered in Solo, Indonesia, to discuss peacemaking and conflict transformation. The meeting was or-

ganised jointly by DAGA and CCA's Justice, International Affairs and Development and Service (JID) and Faith, Mission and Unity (FMU) program areas. Its aim was to look at Asian experiences and concepts of conflict transformation and peacemaking in

order to discern how a regional program designed to document, help build up and strengthen indigenous forms of conflict transformation and peacemaking could most effectively be developed. The first day of the meeting was devoted to visiting three or-

ganisations working on conflict transformation and peacemaking. The first was with members of the Centre for the Study and Promotion of Peace of Universitas Kristen Duta Wacana in Yogyakarta, who outlined their model of conflict transformation and shared about their activities throughout Indonesia.

The second was with the Centre for Intercultural Studies and Conflict Resolution (CISCORE) in Kartasura Solo. This organisation provides advocacy for victims of state violence, human rights violations, law, social, political and economic injustice and women's empowerment. It also works in the fields of participatory research, in-depth study of community, training, interactive seminars and publications. The final visit was with the group for Interfaith Dialogue situated in Solo. Members of various faiths formed it after religious riots rocked the city. As representatives of various faiths, they seek to build understanding and acceptance between Christian, Muslim, Hindu, Confucian and Buddhist communities through social services and interaction.

During the following two days, the sixteen participants shared their experiences working with grassroots communities in conflict situations. While not every participant was working directly with grassroots communities, their sharing of conflict situations and analysis was very helpful. It was clear from the discussions that grassroots communities do have their own indigenous ways to manage conflict and to work at developing peace. Some that were highlighted include:

- The formation of 'peace pacts' among tribes in the Cordillera re-

gion of Northern Luzon, Philippines. These peace pacts are designed to help avert tribal war, protect the land necessary for the survival of the tribe, protect the life of the people and their property, and to protect the honour of the people. Leaders in the peace pact also work hard to expand the peace pact to other tribes to ensure a broader and more stable peace.

- In Papua, conflicts are resolved through different forms, depending on the nature of the conflict or crime that initiated the conflict. In the case of a murder, a peace child is sometimes given to the victim's family as a replacement for the person murdered. This child is accepted as one of the family. In other cases, a woman is given as a wife to the victim's family. In most cases, the peace between the people is signified by a meal shared together on the ground out of a common plate.
- In Thailand various traditions, such as the wrist tying ceremony, are used to bring local villagers, police, the military and government officials together in a ritual that gives them all opportunity to feel equal, and that symbolically binds them all together into one family.
- In Nagalim (a term used by the Naga people to describe a place larger than the state of Nagaland), women often play a major role in peacemaking. If two villages get into a conflict, women from the villages will take the initiative to find the space for dialogue and reconciliation. When women carry a white stick, it is known that they are working on a solution to the conflict. Their role is highly respected.

Participants also shared from their experiences some obstacles to these grassroots initiatives that are sometimes created by outside groups and NGOs wishing to assist with conflict transformation and peacemaking. These include:

- oversimplifying the nature of the conflict and thus failing to deal with the root cause,
- failure to study or recognise the history and culture of the conflict,
- making conflict transformation and peacemaking a very academic activity so that grassroots communities become alienated from the process,
- ignoring the wisdom and activities of the grassroots in conflict transformation,
- strengthening the status quo rather than working for true structural transformation,
- separating the issue of justice from the issue of peacemaking.

After the sharing, time was spent brainstorming on the follow-up work of documenting and helping support these local initiatives. This includes collecting and sharing in a popular format the stories of grassroots initiatives and the indigenous concepts of conflict, peace and justice, organising international campaigns, undertaking research on whether self-determination can take the form of conflict transformation, providing space for women's voices and initiatives to be heard and shared and communicating concerns of grassroots people about the role of outside groups and how their involvement can be less divisive and more supportive to grassroots initiatives.

—Max Ediger

# Truth and Action

## Ecumenical consultation on social advocacy

On 4–8 October a group of twenty-eight Asian participants gathered in the Redemptorist Centre in Pattaya, Thailand, for a consultation on social advocacy. Seven represented the CCA, twelve the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences, and nine the Asia Pacific Alliance of YMCAs.

The group recognised the importance of in-depth understanding of realities, the meaning of faith and how to translate into action one's commitment to social advocacy. The review of realities, reflections as a community in the light of the gospel and responses are constitutive dimensions of social advocacy. The group understood social advocacy as an ongoing process

of influencing decision-makers with a commitment to the pursuit of **truth** in identifying the needs and rights of the disadvantaged in society. Advocacy is not only **action** but involves a comprehensive in-depth analysis and reflection.

It must be done at various levels—global, regional and local. It must confront unjust ideologies. A precondition for social advocacy is the need to gather relevant facts through a thorough investigation.

Social advocacy also involves radical change in faith and its expression. It takes the form of spirituality that enables people to identify with the poor and to suffer with them following the way of Jesus. It is inevitable that

solidarity with the poor will result in the questioning of church structures, its norms and values in the light of Jesus' way and his Gospel. Consequently, compassionate reaching out to the poor will often result in the marginalisation of the advocates themselves even within the church.

Social advocacy begins with analysis of the reality of life situations and experiences leading into faith reflection and concrete transformative actions which bring changes to self, the community and the social realities. Social advocacy is a dynamic process of permanent renewal. It also includes celebration of the signs of hope that God is more fully alive in people's lives.

—Tony Waworuntu



Participants at the consultation on social advocacy in Pattaya, Thailand

# Managerial Skills for Sustainable Development

CCA Development Management Training 2001

**T**he economic downturn in Asia calls for new concepts, strategies and methodologies in community development work. Hence, strengthening managerial capability is as important as sustainability of development projects.

Asia is home to two-thirds of the world's population. While it is the home of the first ten countries with the highest economic growth, ranked between 6 and 8 per cent per annum, it is also the home of people with the lowest per capita income, about US\$570 per year.

The living conditions of the majority of the population of Asia are poor because of high prices of basic commodities, uncertainty of food production, unemployment, lack of public



"Sharing two oranges": discussion with a women's group in Chiang Mai, Thailand

service, low education and weak organisation. In view of this, the CCA Development Management Training 2001 was held 1–28 October in Chiang Mai,

Thailand, to assist in skills training on project administration, including social analysis, leadership development, project writing, planning, monitoring and evaluation. It brought together twenty-one church and community workers from nine countries in Asia.

Rev. Dr Pradit Tagerng-rangsarit of Payap University led Bible studies on development and what development workers should be like. Rev. Sammie Formilleza and Dr Edith Maslang of the University of the Philippines facilitated the discussion on project analysis, planning, monitoring and evaluation. Visits were made to various village development projects conducted by the church and women's groups in Chiang Mai.

—*Prawate Khid-arn*



Participants of DMT 2001 during the leadership formation and development session



# Facing a Deadly Disease

HIV/AIDS calls for a religious response

**T**he HIV/AIDS pandemic poses physical, mental, social and spiritual challenges for those living with it and their caregivers. The HIV/AIDS problem is now everyone's concern.

Asia is home to 60 per cent of the world's population and is considered to be the next flash point for HIV. At the end of 2000 there were 5.8 million people living with HIV/AIDS in South and Southeast Asia and about 640,000 cases in East Asia (UNAIDS,

2000). In 2001 there were around 800,000 new HIV cases in South and Southeast Asia, mostly in India. Cambodia has the highest infection rate. About 4 per cent of its adult population has HIV and the figure is growing.

In addition to physical and medical aspects, the HIV/AIDS pandemic raises questions of social and ethical concern. AIDS is not merely a health issue, but also a major life crisis of the spirit, the mind and the environment,

due to social and economic pressures, poverty and ignorance.

From this perspective, involvement in HIV/AIDS concerns is a way of 're-thinking' human relations, social understanding, forgiveness, reconciliation and unity.

To ensure that people with HIV/AIDS (PWA) live a full life in their community, religious organisations, in parallel with scientific and medical research, are actively involved in searching out ways to care for them

## It's Too Painful: The Voice of a Sufferer

**I**t's too painful! Don't hide if you are infected. It's like a living death. There is not yet any medicine to cure the virus. Death is the only cure. One million, ten million or even one hundred million baht cannot kill the virus. I warn all brothers, sisters and friends to be very careful. There is no way to overcome HIV/AIDS.

Dr Sangwarn, I am Ms Yupin Jomtham. I am ready to help you. You can take me along with you everywhere you go to tell the people about the life and discrimination against people living with AIDS. I am ready any time. In Tambol (District) Bhanai, nobody accepts me. They reject people living with AIDS. Day by day I am a lonely person with no friends. I only know disappointment. My situation is worsening. I cannot stand any more. My future is getting darker and darker. I know that there are five different diseases in my body.

I request the doctors of Phrao Hospital, officers of the Health Care Center, staff of the CCT AIDS Ministry and staff of the White Sky Project to kindly arrange Yupin's funeral ceremony. I am a poor person who has

nothing and no support from any association. Please invite more people to my funeral.

Kindly distribute my clothes to needy people. Don't burn them. It's better to donate them for better merit in the future. I already washed, ironed and sterilised all of them. I humbly request this from you!

I kindly request everyone to not hate people living with HIV/AIDS. Every person living with AIDS is already distressed and pained. With your love and care, they can live longer.

With high respect, Yupin

*(Ms Yupin left this letter before committing self-immolation. Yupin was a PWA who lived in Chiang Mai, Thailand. She suffered with the virus for about five years until her self-immolation in September 2001 in the community cemetery. She left behind two children, a 19-year-old daughter and a 10-year-old son. The CCT AIDS Ministry and the White Sky Project now are taking care of her daughter.)*

and their families. The Christian Conference of Asia has encouraged member churches to begin programs for public awareness and building capability in creating a caring life together. In the midst of suffering and misery, religious faith, doctrines and practices play a significant role in programs in which people with HIV/AIDS can experience love, care and compassion.

In the continuum of care for people with HIV/AIDS, efforts range from prevention, screening and management to palliative care, home care and grief counselling. While many governments and non-governmental organisations direct their activities to the first half of the care spectrum, religious organisations are more likely to focus their efforts on the latter half to ensure that people with AIDS have dignity in life and in death.

Therefore, the challenge to religious institutions and organisations is enormous—not only in prevention and management of the physical process of disease, but in the harmony between God and creation, and between humankind and the environment.

Considering the seriousness of the HIV/AIDS pandemic and the urgency in containing it, the CCA program area on Justice, International Affairs, Development and Service organised an interreligious consultation on a ministry to people living with HIV/AIDS in Asia.

The consultation was held in collaboration with the AIDS Ministry of the Church of Christ in Thailand. Former Prime Minister of Thailand, H.E. Anand Panyarachun, was guest speaker at an open forum on 26 November.

—*Prawate Khid-arn*

## Consultation on Children's Rights

**W**hile Asian countries continue to face economic turmoil, millions of Asian children continue to be exposed to the negative impact of globalisation, sexual abuse, child labour, trafficking, drugs and substance abuse, armed conflict, violence, the spread of HIV/AIDS and a lack of legal protection mechanisms.

Although all Asian governments have ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, they continue to join the bandwagon of globalisation, thereby depriving the rights of their younger generation. The churches in Asia, meanwhile, have either been silent on this issue or have maintained an approach of charity in addressing the problems of children.

In order to challenge the churches to transform their traditional charity

approach and address the needs of millions of Asian children, the Christian Conference of Asia Faith Mission and Unity program area, in cooperation with the World Council of Churches, held a consultation on 'Affirming Fullness of Life and Dignity of Children' on 9–15 November in Bangkok, Thailand.

Representatives of various churches and ecumenical and children's organisations in Asia met to share concerns about the rights and dignity of children. Dr Mathews George Chuna-kara, WCC's Asia secretary, called on churches to participate in the global movement for the dignity of children. Rev. Larry J. Herrera from the Philippines led Bible studies that reminded participants of their responsibilities and commitment to affirm the fullness of life and dignity of children.

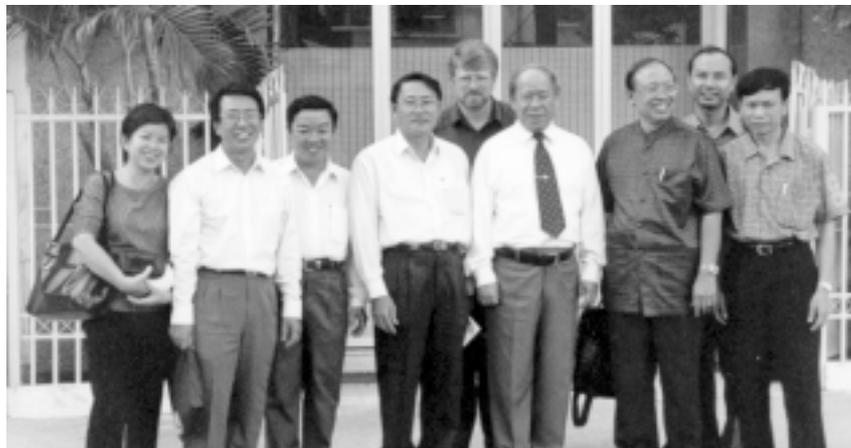


## Visit to Laos, Vietnam and Cambodia

**O**n 10–16 September, a CCA delegation headed by General Secretary Ahn Jae Woong visited Laos, Vietnam and Cambodia.

The three countries that make up the so-called Indochina subregion share historical elements of colonisation and war. They are also among the poorest economies in Asia. They share the presence of a strong Buddhist culture and a small and fragile Christian population. The few churches have suffered through years of war and are slowly rebuilding their witness and relationships. Aside from discrimination, the churches also have to contend with the operations and impact of foreign missions.

The CCA visit was to express solidarity with the churches and gain an understanding of their current situation in order to identify resources and programs that could assist them.



The recommendations made after the visit include:

- that CCA and the WCC convene a meeting of evangelical churches operating in the socialist countries to discuss common concerns,
- that the CCA continue to help in the leadership development of the local churches, youth, women and men, and the building of relation-

ship among the churches,

- that priority be given to encouraging and supporting students for theological study

Other members of the delegation were Tony Waworuntu, John Gilmore, Prawate Khid-arn, Khamphone Kounthapanya, Sengdao Sonphounout and Songkiat Tung-yen.

—Tony Waworuntu

## Leadership Training for Indochina Churches

**F**ifteen participants from Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia attended a leadership training organised by CCA's Justice, International Affairs, Development and Service program area at Tao Fong Shan Centre in Hong Kong, 29 October – 3 November. The training consisted of Bible studies on leadership, sessions on personal development, the history of the ecumenical movement in Asia, the art of communication in leadership, program planning, implementing and management and partnership in leadership for transformation.



## Meet the Presidents of CCA—1

# Wong Wai Ching

**W**ong Wai Ching is an associate professor at the Chinese University of Hong Kong. She was born in Hong Kong, of poor parents who came from a rural area of mainland China. She attended Christian primary and high schools, and while in Form 4 she was persuaded by a Christian classmate to become a Christian. Thus it was that Wai Ching became the first in her family to become a Christian. She attended the Kindly Light Anglican church. At the time this church had a mission to people in resettlement areas and Wai Ching, along with other young enthusiastic teachers, social workers and students became immersed in mission to poor and underprivileged people.

Wai Ching enrolled at the Chinese University of Hong Kong and while there joined the Student Christian Movement. This extended her interests in helping the poor to a wider world than Hong Kong. As a student she attended a human resources development program in Bangkok and with twenty other students visited poor urban areas seeing the effects of the government's relocation of people for development and the adverse effects of tourism. Her fellow students opened her eyes to what they were doing resisting repressive regimes in their countries. This widened her perspective of Christianity as not just being concerned about the individual, but also about society and the world. It reinforced her already strong sense of



mission. If others could do so much why not us at home?

So Wai Ching and her friends started a small tutorial group for poor children, offering them free tuition. All this time she was studying for a BA in theology, which she finished in 1985. SCM provided contacts that were invaluable in her studies and were to lead to her interest in women's issues. Attending study groups on issues such as beauty pageants and church and women developed a focus for the rest of her studies.

Wai Ching became a part of the Hong Kong Christian Industrial Committee, an outspoken group on grassroots issues arguing for fair pay and conditions. She spent two years full time on this, helping set up a labour church, organising protests and determining how matters could be improved and how problems could be solved. While continuing this work part-time she taught at the university and continued studying, obtaining a BD (Hons).

In 1989 Wai Ching went to the University of Chicago to do her MA and PhD, accompanied by her husband Tim, a fellow university student she had married two years before. Her study and reading in Chicago resolved some of the difficult questions she had been asking about the work with workers and the poor and she achieved personal growth and understanding of the world around her.

Wai Ching had been the leader of the Hong Kong SCM and when she returned home she was appointed Asia-Pacific secretary of the World Student Christian Federation, which brought her back into the ecumenical circle.

Following this, in 1995 she took up a post as an assistant lecturer in theology at the Chinese University of Hong Kong and subsequently as assistant professor in the Department of Religion and coordinating the gender studies of the university. She is also warden of a women's hostel at the university. Lately she has taken on a position as associate professor in the Intercultural Department. Her husband Tim teaches Chinese religion in the Department of Religion. They have a three-year old daughter Shu Yin and attend Holy Trinity Anglican Church in Kowloon City.

Her nomination for CCA presidency by the Hong Kong Christian Council came as surprise, and she now finds herself as part of what she sees as the third generation of CCA leadership. The first generation consisted of the dreamers, those with a vision of an

# Planting Seeds of Hope

CCA holds two roundtable meetings

'Planting seeds of hope' was the theme of one of the liturgies during the Global Roundtable with partner churches and agencies from Europe and the USA. That idea summed up the commitment to renewed partnership which permeated both the Asia Roundtable (15–18 October) and Global Roundtable (7–9 November).

The historic first Asia Roundtable gathered member churches and councils from Hong Kong, Japan, Korea and Australia to look again at how our churches commit themselves to the ecumenical work in Asia. In the process, churches and councils realised anew that we can all contribute to the growing of ecumenical seeds of life and hope that will bear fruits of peace-making and justice-seeking in our region.

The churches and councils welcomed the challenge and our responsibility to nurture, protect and develop those seeds.

All pledged to increase their financial and other commitments to the work and will continue to look for



Ecumenical partners, Kirsten Larsen and Hannelore Moll, planting seeds

ways to promote the ecumenical work in Asia in their own countries.

The Global Roundtable brought some faithful friends of the CCA and some new ones. The partners from churches and mission boards from Germany, Britain, the USA, the Netherlands, Norway and Denmark were excited by the good work being done by CCA and have pledged to assist CCA to continue to develop fruitful partnerships based on our shared commitment to fullness of life for all. So, for

example, a delegation to visit the churches of Europe, the churches in the USA, consultancy around improved reporting and monitoring, joint participation in campaigns and advocacy around issues such as trade, development, human rights were all heartily agreed upon. Their commitment has been expressed in a way which clearly enables CCA to set priorities based upon needs.

In both meetings the Spirit moved!

—*Mandy Tibbey*

ecumenical movement in Asia. The next generation pushed these ideas to new heights as they struggled with issues within Asia such as dictatorships, militarism and poverty. For the third generation the old analyses and agendas are no longer there. Much of Asia has become prosperous and demo-

cratic. The world has changed, and places such as Hong Kong see themselves as part of the world rather than as part of Asia. Churches have become richer, but support for the ecumenical movement has become impoverished. People in the churches do not feel part of it. Who now owns this

movement? Who is it serving? Do we need a new understanding of our Asian identity? Do we need a new generation of dreamers? These are issues Wai Ching feels we need to address as she develops her role as a CCA president.

—*Geoff Alves*

# Sharing the Journey

## 2001 Asia Ecumenical Course

This year's Asia Ecumenical Course was hosted by the Mar Thoma Church on 15 August – 10 September at the Christian Education Centre in Kerala, India. Dr Ipe Joseph, NCC India General Secretary, served as dean. There were twenty-five participants (ten women and fifteen men) from nine countries.

The opening ceremony on 16 August included a parade of participants, course leaders and guests, ushered in by young women with baskets of flowers and by traditional Kerala drummers. A Mar Thoma Church choir led in the music. Bishop Joseph Mar Irenaeus, Suffragan Metropolitan of the Mar Thoma Church and a president of the CCA, challenged the congregation in his message to try new ways of doing things, following Jesus in unfamiliar tracks.

Using the cycle of experience-analysis-reflection-action, the course provided various approaches to learning in and for community on the theme 'Ecumenical Learning in the Context of Asian Plurality'. Words such as 'ecumenism as relationship', 'connectedness with God, with self, with others and with creation', 'learning in community', 'ecumenism is about being human', 'ecumenical movement is about dreaming and putting it into reality' permeated the ecumenical journey of the group. They had meditative exercises, worship, Bible studies, study sessions, exposure, theological reflections, cultural nights, group processing and ecumenical jokes, communicating the ecumenical vision, action planning and evaluation.

In-house sessions were enriched by resource persons such as Rev. David

Gill, Dr Gert Rueppell, Dr Mathews George Chunakara, Bro. Edmund Chia and nine local resource persons who spoke on various topics on Asian realities, Christianity in Asia, the ecumenical movement, interfaith dialogue and communicating the ecumenical vision. Exposure visits were made to three Dalit communities to listen to the stories of the marginalised and to churches for worship experiences with congregations of the Mar Thoma Church, the Church of South India, the Roman Catholic Church, the Salvation Army, the Orthodox Syrian Church, the Syrian Orthodox (Jacobite) Church and the Pentecostal Church, which widened the participants' memory of the churches' various traditions and broadened their ecumenical space.

Hannah Chen from Taiwan shared her reflection on the module on inter-religious dialogue: 'Since ecumenism includes all people in the world, as well as the whole nature, interreligious dialogue also deserved our high concern. We had a Hindu resource person and two resource persons on understanding Muslim spirituality. The sharing and spirited discussions showed us that in order to improve the welfare of humanity every religion needs to put its tradition into introspection, that all of us should be more humble, expand more space for ecumenism and pay more respect for other's religions. Otherwise, ecumenism would totally lose its meaning.' —*Cora Tabing-Reyes*



# Fullness of Life for All

A meditation by Jenny Dawson, CCA President

Readings: Psalm 8 and John 16:16-24

**Y**ou and I know that our commitment to fullness of life for all does not make our lives easy, and it is important that we find ways to encourage each other. I chose the gospel reading because of verses 21 and 22 in particular. I quite often hear myself talking about childbirth in pastoral conversations, as I try to encourage Christians with whom I work. There are two things you are likely to hear me say.

One is, 'Breathe through the pain.' When it really hurts, where there is difficulty, remember to keep breathing. Pay attention to yourself; pay attention to your own need for the basics of life, but remember also not to fight the pain itself. If you hold your breath in fear, the pain is much worse and you can't work with the energy the muscle cramps produce.

The second way I use the image of childbirth is exactly as it is used here in John's gospel. John is saying, 'Afterwards you won't remember the pain in the same way as you're aware of it when you are experiencing it. One day you will look

back on this time and see that it is contributing to something much greater, whereas now it seems overwhelmingly terrible, an almost impossible struggle.

Obviously, I find this image of childbirth helpful, which is why I use it and it maybe for you too, I don't know. I am aware though that when I use the language of childbirth, men often say, 'I wouldn't know about that, that hasn't been part of my experience.' Of course that is true. I am aware that I have given birth three times so

I have memories of childbirth and what it means and I've supported other women in the process. Birth is something that women talk about. Certainly in my own country, men are involved much more today than they used to be but the whole area of childbirth is still largely women's business.

So one of the things that interests me is, if most men I talk to don't know a lot about childbirth, how come John did enough to put this in the gospel? I think it is highly likely that as the gospel writers gathered up their material from con-



Madonna of the Lotus by Sanaol Chinnawong (Thailand)

## REFLECTION

versations with other people, there were some women's conversations behind this piece that has become chapter 16 of John's gospel. So we can claim, I think, that there has been some women's input into the gospel writing—a fact that the church is still struggling to take seriously. I believe we can say that women's stories have, right from the time of Mary Magdalene, been a part of spreading the gospel. Let me quote from a writer called Joanna Dewey:

Stories have power, stories are important in determining how we understand ourselves and live our lives. Stories of the second testament have helped to form Christian women's lives both to empower them and to limit and restrict them. It matters who tells the stories (and who hears them); it matters what stories are told, it matters who chooses the stories to be told.

That is extremely important because while childbirth happens thousands of times every day in this world of ours, it is in fact strangely invisible. The language of childbirth is not used in boardrooms, amongst political leaders, or decision makers by and large, and yet the stories around childbirth and the image of childbirth have the power to help us understand ourselves and our lives. This power is of particular significance in struggle and pain as we look to the building of new communities. So we are making the invisible, visible, in order to make visible that for which we hope and dream and work, that which we cannot yet see.

The world of early Christianity was a world of oral communication. Women were full participants as active proclaimers and storytellers as well as receptive listeners. The stories that were told by the people who weren't valued by society have, by some miracle, come down through the church's history to us and they remind us that our faith is a faith that values the people whom the culture and society do not normally value. 'When a woman is in labour she has pain because her hour has come but when her child is born she no longer remembers the anguish because of the joy of having brought a human being into the world. So you have pain now but I will see you again,' says Jesus, 'and your hearts will rejoice and no one will take your joy from you.' That deep

encouragement coming out of the experience of the less visible half of the human race touches my life in a way that never ceases to surprise me. Even more so when we read in Psalm 8, 'what are human beings that you care for them yet ... you have crowned with glory and honour ... you have given them dominion over the works of your hands?' These human beings, whose lives seem messy and difficult and who are engaged in the hard work of birthing something new, have been crowned with honour and glory by our creator God. For the psalmist, all life begins and ends with God.

Hold that wonderful image of Psalm 8 in your mind as we think for a moment about what's happening in our own countries. In my country of Aotearoa New Zealand, we have had some very sad cases in recent times of small children being abused, being murdered through neglect. We are realising we are not a society that cares for our children, we are not a society that takes seriously that in giving birth we are partners in work of creation. I think of the fate of the girl child in China or India, and I am reminded again of the Psalmist's words, 'What are human beings that you care for them?' This is a question that our cultures find hard to answer.

As we work for change, as we dream of the new world, as we share together in planning and praying and hoping, let's remember that the measure of justice will be what happens to the smallest people, what happens to our little ones in our societies. So we get hope from the words of John's gospel that our sorrow will turn to joy. We remember to keep breathing through the pain and not be overwhelmed by it because we believe there will be something greater than this. We believe we are called to work with the creator in giving birth to the new—that is fullness of life for all. That is the only way I know that we can live in this world as it is.

Jesus, at the end of the gospel reading, says, 'Until now you have not asked for anything in my name; ask and you will receive so that your joy may be complete.' Ask and you will receive. So, keep on dreaming, keep on hoping, keep on breathing, because we are birthing God's new world.

*(This meditation was given by Jenny Dawson during the CCA Executive Committee Meeting in Hong Kong on 30 June 2001.)*

# Parting Words from Outgoing Staff

**T**hree staff members are leaving CCA soon. The Rev. Dr Henriette Hutabarat Lebang was Associate General Secretary for Program Coordination from October 1991 to December 2000. With the restructuring of CCA, her post became Associate General Secretary for Relationships and Communication from January 2001, a post she holds until the end of December 2001. Cynthia Yuen served as youth consultant from September 1999 to August 2001 and part time until December 2001. Louise Scott has been a volunteer librarian with CCA since 1998. She will move in January to Perth, Western Australia, where her husband David has taken up a professorship at Curtin University.

## *CCA News: What was the most satisfying aspect of your time with the CCA?*

**Ery:** Building relationships and friendships with people of different backgrounds. One of the crucial aspects of the ecumenical movement is about building relationships. It is an intrinsic character of being the church of Jesus Christ. Arranging and coordinating programs of CCA has always been an enriching challenge for me. These include the Asia Ecumenical Course (1992–1993), and learning and growing together with the participants; the Asia Mission Conference (1994), reflecting on the missionary tasks of the Asian churches in the pluralistic context of Asia; two CCA General Assemblies (Colombo 1995, Tomohon

2000); the Joint Program of CCA and WSCF (1994–1998), to strengthen the churches to respond to the issue of campus ministry; the CCA and FABC Joint Program, particularly the seminar on Asian Movement for Christian Unity (AMCU I, II, III) and the Joint Ecumenical Formation program. It is encouraging to see that the cooperation between the two bodies is growing significantly.

**Cynthia:** As a youth working for youth in Asia, I had the chance to ‘connect’ myself with young people and their struggles in Asia-Pacific. I was happy to serve as their coworker. I witnessed their tireless commitment to make their societies better. The more I worked with them, the more I became convinced that the real battle for change is at the local level. CCA Youth is trying to make a space for young people’s collective voice to be heard. During my two years, I visited countries that I could not have imagined going to, such as East Timor. I worked



Ery Hutabarat

with so many people, with immense differences but united in spirit as Christians. All these experiences challenged me to critically reflect on what we mean by the ecumenical movement for our space and time.

**Louise:** Being able to assist in a small way the work of the CCA. Before coming to live in Hong Kong, I was aware of the work of CCA because I had been a member of churches in Thailand, New Zealand and Australia as well as working as a lay chaplain with ITIM New Zealand and in the ecumenical chaplaincy team at Queensland University of Technology and Griffith University in Brisbane, Australia.

## *CCA News: What was the most challenging part of your time with CCA?*

**Ery:** Working in the plural context of the churches, communities in Asia and the staff of the CCA requires a willingness to listen and to learn from each other, and to appreciate the differences with integrity. We need to make sure that the discussions at the regional level are part of the life of the local churches. It requires an understanding of the dynamics of the local churches and the commitment to work with the churches.

**Cynthia:** The most challenging part is how to articulate a unifying Christian identity or direction for young people with such huge differences in Asia Pacific. Young people are not sat-

ified with the old saying 'unity in diversity'. They need clear ways on how to live this reality. In our time, we only found more and more segregation, a widening gap between peoples. In our CCA context, for example, there is a widening gap between the participation of youth and senior, lay and clergy, women and men. So, how do we realise the concept of partnership and the need to negotiate those differences?. That is the challenge for our time, including CCA.

**Louise:** Learning something of library science—archiving after several life changes from geographer to nurse-midwife to ecumenical lay chaplain! I needed to understand the in-house cataloguing system developed for CCA by past library staff so that I could continue the process of recataloguing the collections brought together from the previous scattered CCA offices. With much of the data of previous collections now entered into the library program it is becoming possible to find some material to assist staff. I have found CCA to be very inclusive of all who participate in the work. But volunteers everywhere are in an awkward situation: included, but often with no defined role or responsibilities and not around all the time. However, as water finds its own level, over the passage of time I have found that the adjustment has been made.

**CCA News:** *In your opinion, what tough issues will CCA have to deal with in the future?*

**Ery:** CCA needs to strengthen the churches in Asia to respond to the dra-

matic changes of Asia and the global context. In the midst of many divisions and signs of fragmentation in Asian communities, especially along religious and ethnic lines, CCA needs to assist the churches to grow and work together with the communities, beyond the differences.

**Cynthia:** How to make a regional structure 'valid' in the life of the grassroots churches, movements and congregations is, to me, a very tough issue that CCA needs to face. We are used to words like 'regional,' 'national,' and 'local' but we need to think about going beyond those categories and intentionally address the gaps between the CCA constituencies.

**Louise:** Interfaith work in a time of international conflict and shortage of funding in a time of economic restraint.

**CCA News:** *Please say something about what you will do after your time with CCA.*

**Ery:** I will return to my home church, Toraja Church in Sulawesi, Indonesia. The General Assembly of my church last July elected me as Vice Moderator of the synod with a special responsibility to direct and coordinate the formation and mission program. This full-time assignment starts on 1 January 2002. It is a great challenge for me to return to my home church and to facilitate the interpretation and implementation of some of the ecumenical discussions in the life of the local congregations. I am excited to go back and work with local church leaders to



Cynthia Yuen

empower the parishioners to implement the theme of Toraja Church for the next five years, 'peace for all'. This is a formidable task for Indonesian churches in the midst of the many changes and concerns in the present Indonesian society.

**Cynthia:** During my term with CCA, I was greatly inspired by the Rural Youth Program, which is a longstanding concern of CCA Youth. It is a very valuable priority for CCA. The more I worked on it, the more I became convinced that alternative rural development is important for our time. So, after CCA,



Louise Scott

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## FAREWELL

I will work for rural community development in China. I am sure my training and exposure in CCA will help me to strategise with other concerned people for China's rural communities.

**Louise:** I will be moving back to Australia where my husband will be taking up a new post. Since I will reach retirement age next year, I plan to take time to do a review of my life and write up some notes from the time I spent working with the United Congregational Churches in Southern Africa in what is now rural Zimbabwe. These,

along with sets of slides taken in those days of ferment leading up to the war for liberation, will be passed on to the Council for World Mission for archiving. There are similar ones to be sorted for the Methodist Church of Nigeria from the year before the coup in 1975 when the new military government took over the church-run hospitals. My time helping in the archives at CCA has impressed upon me the value of preserving some material that may not have been of great significance in its day but becomes of great interest in later years when circumstances

may have altered almost beyond imagining. Having moved homes and jobs many times, I have lost some facility with my own language and have found a means of expression and communication across language barriers using scraps of fabric collected from around the world. One of my new tasks will be to finish a quilted wall-hanging called 'Basho pines in Hong Kong' using scraps of old Japanese work-clothes fabric combined with new fabric from many countries, interpreting a haiku from the poet Basho using an American pine-tree design.

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## NEWSBRIEFS

### People

#### Taiwan

The Rev. Lai Rong-Sin was installed as the new bishop of the Taiwan Episcopal Diocese at the Cathedral of St John on 24 August 2001. Lai Rong-Sin said he had much to learn as he takes over responsibility for his diocese. Since his consecration last October he has had to get used to being called 'bishop'. Every time he hears the title ('chuchiau' in Chinese, implying he is a master or lord of the church) he turns it around in his head to be reminded that he is one whom the Lord (Chu) is teaching (chiao). He says, 'The episcopacy is not a set of rights and privileges, it is a Holy Spirit-given responsibility and authority. A bishop must humbly and purely serve his people from his heart.'

The Union Theological Seminary (UTS) in New York City chose the Rev.

D.C. M. Kao, former general secretary of the Presbyterian Church in Taiwan, to be the recipient of this year's Union Honor Medal. The award is given at the discretion of the UTS board to a Christian who has exemplified action for justice and peace. The Honor Medal was instituted in 1986 by the UTS. Among the recipients are Kim Dae Jung of Korea, Andrew Young of the USA, and Bishop K.H. Ting from China.

#### Indonesia

The Communion of Churches in Indonesia (PGI) held its Central Committee Meeting on 15–21 November in Prapat, North Sumatra. About 100 church leaders from member churches of PGI gathered to decide on the annual program and budget for 2002. The committee also aimed to address issues arising from the September 11 hijacking attacks in the US, which are also impacting on the situation in Indonesia. Tony Waworuntu represented the CCA at the meeting.

#### Bangladesh

The Church of Bangladesh held its fourth synod meeting on 7–9 November on the theme, 'Who do you say that I am?' The Rt Rev. Michael S. Baroi was elected Moderator of the Church of Bangladesh. He succeeds the Rt Rev. Barnabas Dwijen Mondal, Bishop of Dhaka, who is the current moderator of the Church of Bangladesh.

#### Korea

The National Council of Churches in Korea celebrated its 77th anniversary on 23 September at the Saemunan Church in Seoul, the place where it was originally formed. CCA General Secretary Ahn Jae Woong extended greetings on the occasion and attended a reception at Sejong Cultural Centre in Seoul. On 19 November, Ahn Jae Woong presented a paper on 'Global Trends and Churches' Responses' during the 50th General Assembly of the NCC-Korea, which was held at Chongno Evangelical Church in Seoul. The Rev. Paik Do

Woong, current Associate General Secretary, was elected General Secretary of the NCKK. He will succeed the Rev. Kim Dong Wan who will finish his term of eight years in April 2002.

### Philippines

The General Convention of the National Council of Churches in the Philippines was held in Iloilo City, hosted by the Convention of Philippine Baptist Churches. The opening holy communion was celebrated by the CPBC, a member church of the NCCP. The keynote address was given by Bishop Solito Toquero of the United Methodist Church. The theme of the conven-

tion was 'Pushing Our Ecumenical Agenda through Changing Circumstance'. Mandy Tibbey represented CCA at the convention.

### Japan

The Korean Christian Church in Japan held its 46th General Assembly at Nagoya Church in Nagoya, Japan, on 23–25 October. The theme was 'A Church Following Christ, Clearing the Way for a New History'. At this meeting, the Rev. Lee Byung Ku, pastor of Imafuku Church, was elected moderator of the KCCJ while the Rev. Park Sookil of Kyoto Church was elected the general secretary.

## Training Program

**B**ishop J.V. Samuel, a former general secretary of CCA, called globalisation a new form of slavery for poor countries, which throws new ideological challenges for people-oriented organisations like CCA URM. He inaugurated a South Asian regional training workshop for grassroots workers in Karachi, Pakistan, on 6–9 September, jointly organised by the CCA Faith Mission and Unity program area and Idara-e-Amn-o-Insaf. Idara is an ecumenical church body of the Catholic Church and the Church of Pakistan, Karachi Dioceses, and a long-time partner of the CCA. Ivan Edwin, treasurer of Idara, gave the keynote address. During deliberations, participants raised issues including the influence of military and civil bureaucracy, feudal domination in the rural areas, the absentee landlord system, a proper national accountability system, religious extremism etc. They affirmed that grassroots work and leadership building demand close collaboration of like-minded groups. They also affirmed the need for interfaith dialogue and for contextualising theology. They called for an appropriate model of development in South Asia, a relevant ideology and theology for grassroots work. Fifty-two human and women's rights activists, media persons, community organisers, social animators and staff of church-related bodies and NGOs represented seventeen church-related and people-oriented organisations at the meeting. —*Hamid Henry*

## Seminar on Codes of Conduct

**M**any companies, especially in labour-intensive sectors such as the textile industry, have adopted codes of conduct in response to consumers' campaigns, for instance the Clean Clothes Campaign.

These codes raise many questions: for example are codes of conduct effective tools to improve the labour conditions of the workers in the whole production chain (including subcontractors), or are they are just a public relations exercise for the company?

The Clean Clothes Campaign has been active in many European countries since 1990 but until now all its initiatives have been strongly originated, oriented and dominated by those in the developed world. There is an urgent need now to involve partners and organisations in Asia.

Hence a seminar on codes of conduct was held in Bangkok, Thailand,

on 26–30 November, to initiate discussion between friends in the developed world and NGOs in Asia on ways to make codes of conduct a tool for workers and local groups.

The seminar discussed ways to use these codes for workers' education and local organisations' empowerment, to build capacities and promote the involvement of workers and local groups, NGOs and unions in monitoring, labour rights and defence.

Organised jointly by CCA's FMU (URM) program area and the Documentation for Action Groups in Asia, the seminar brought together labour activists from both secular and ecumenical organisations. Also participating were friends from Bread for All in Switzerland, the Anglican Church in Canada and the Interfaith Center on Corporate Responsibility in New York.

—*Chan Beng Seng*

# T.K. Thomas

(1925–2001)

**P**rof. T.K. Thomas, a renowned ecumenical leader, creative theologian and distinguished son of the Mar Thoma Church, passed away on 25 October in Chennai (Madras). The funeral service was held at the Jerusalem Mar Thoma Church, Chennai, on 26 October.

TK, as he was affectionately known, started his distinguished career as a teacher at the Union Christian College, Alwaye. Within a short while, he proceeded to the Madras Christian College as professor of English language and literature. A deeply committed Christian and ecumenist, he soon left the security of his profession for the uncertainty of a life devoted to study and publications in church-related ecumenical bodies. He became associated with the Christian Literature Society (CLS, Madras) and the Christian Institute for the Study of Religion and Society (CISRS, Bangalore). TK was a close associate of the late Dr M.M. Thomas. Together they brought out some of the finest books in Indian Christian theology during the 1960s and 70s. The long and impressive list of study materials that emerged from CLS and CISRS during this period bear witness to TK's creativity, commitment and expertise.

TK's contributions were recognised internationally when he was invited to head the Communications department of the Christian Conference of Asia in 1977–81. Based in Singapore and



Prof T.K. Thomas

Hong Kong, for several years he coordinated, at the Asian level, the study and research in the skills and theology of communication. The pinnacle of TK's lifelong career was when he moved on to Geneva to take charge of the Publications Department of the World Council of Churches. For over a decade, he presided over the publication work of the WCC.

A creative person, TK was a sought-after writer and editor. Few books and articles appeared under his name, but the key publications that emerged from CCA and WCC in the 1970s and 80s bear throughout the stamp of his creative skills at language and editing and deep insights in theology.

T.K. Thomas was a loyal member of the Mar Thoma Church. Realising his

talents, the late Metropolitan Juahnon Mar Thoma asked him, in the 1970s, to translate the liturgy of the Holy Communion service from Malayalam to English. A look at the translated liturgy, now used in Mar Thoma churches all over the world, reveals the expertise of TK who, while translating the liturgy into current English, retained the depth and richness of its eastern tradition.

TK's was a critical relationship with the church. Lately, he had become critical of several trends in the church that he felt went against the spirit of unity and witness. The leadership of the church however respected and valued his dissenting note. Metropolitan Chrysostom said recently, 'There is considerable truth when people like T.K. Thomas say that our ecumenism has not in any way reached our churches back home. He says that we have learnt to keep our ecumenical activities at another level and in a separate compartment.'

In recognition of his great services to the church and the theology of communication, the Serampore University recently conferred on TK the honorary degree of Doctor of Divinity (*Honoris Causa*).

Professor Thomas leaves behind his wife Kunjannama Thomas, and two sons, Pradeep (World Alliance of Christian Communication, London) and Prem (business, Chennai).

—*Jesudas M. Athyal*

## Tribute to TK by Old Friends

**A**t the beginning of the meeting of the Asian Ecumenical History project group in Hong Kong on 15 November, old friends reminisced and paid tribute to T.K. Thomas

**Ninan Koshy:** I met TK forty-two years ago in Madras when he was active in the Mar Thoma youth and I in the CSI youth. He dressed in a simple Gandian way and stood apart from many. After college he spent most of his life in Christian literature. I acknowledge with gratitude his contribution to the ecumenical movement through editing and therefore his contribution to Christian thought. The best thoughts and ideas of the ecumenical movement found expression through his editing. He could stylistically improve material on any topic. He had a precision in use of the word. Many books in the names of distinguished people are well known because of his expert editing. So he enabled others.

He had a sense of humour that bordered on the cynical. In the briefest of words he could see through things, persons and events and expose the foibles and follies of people in churches and in the ecumenical movement. He was intolerant of hypocrisy in persons or movements. Out of his faith commitment he insisted on shedding this.

**Park Sang Jung:** I was in Madras for the NCC assembly in 1989 when we heard that the CCA office in Singapore had been closed. I was depressed. TK took me out for a very fancy dinner. He said, 'Maybe it is God's will. Maybe

God's will is that CCA move to Madras.' He was describing the beauty and wonder of Madras and by the end of the conversation practically had me convinced. His sense of humour and hospitality struck me. During the period of dictatorship in Korea, one Japanese newspaper regularly gave space to write about developments in Korea. There was much curiosity about the identity of the anonymous columnist. I can now reveal that it was TK. We have now brought a lot of what were then underground materials back to Korea, to be made available to the public. When the time comes, we will let the world know how these were smuggled out of Korea to safety.

**Ron O'Grady:** He was the best editor the ecumenical movement has ever had. After he left the WCC they kept sending him books to edit. We were on the CCA staff together and were really good friends. We were on the same wavelength. His simplicity and Gandian way were striking. He edited *CCA News* and I did cartoons and drawings. We were in each other's offices all the time, discussing pictures and publications. I learned how important Christian faith was in his everyday life. He and his beloved wife Mol would sit every morning and read the Bible, talk about it and reflect on it. He told me that he prayed for me and others every day. He had an ability to read a passage and pick it up and apply it for the day. We would often have a whisky together. He loved to talk. He had a great sense of humour, sometimes cynical. I remember once we

passed a poster about a particular evangelist which read: 'He has been used by God in many countries.' TK remarked, 'It should say, "He has used God in many countries."' He didn't get involved in church politics for he didn't see that as his role. He was renowned for being impartial and a friend to both sides. He saw the good in everybody.

**Kang Moon Kyu:** He was very talented, very warm and had an embracing way.

## Farewell to David Gill

**D**avid Gill is retiring as General Secretary of the National Council of Churches in Australia at the end of the year. On Friday, 2 December 2001, a farewell dinner was held in Sydney to mark the occasion, attended by the Governor General of Australia, the NCCA executive, heads of churches, former general secretaries and staff and ecumenical and interfaith representatives.

In 2002 David will take up an appointment as minister of Kowloon Union Church in Hong Kong.



Presentation made to David Gill by the president of the NCCA, Rev. Lance Steicke

# Changing Times Down Under

The National Council of Churches in Australia

**T**he churches in Asia's southern continent find themselves grappling, once again, with ancient demons.

International events, plus a federal election in which both major political parties played to people's insecurities, have given new life to three threats to Australia's life: jingoism sparked by the September 11 tragedy in the USA, sectarianism between the local lunatic fringes of Christianity and Islam, and xenophobia aimed at hapless asylum seekers, or 'boat people'.

The country's church leaders were out front in calling for a speedy end to US military action in Afghanistan, greater mutual respect between Christians and Muslims and a more compassionate response to refugees.

They did not mince words, particularly regarding asylum seekers. 'We have had an election in a moral vacuum,' said Tim Costello, president of the Baptist Union of Australia, as he joined with other Protestant, Catholic and Orthodox leaders in condemning the refugee policies of both parties as inhumane.

These are not the only concerns looming large on the national agenda. Reconciliation between indigenous and settler Australians still has far to go. Pressure to end an absurd constitutional link with the British monarchy will see new, probably successful moves towards becoming a republic. Foreign policy in the region, especially towards neighbouring Indonesia, needs urgent overhaul.

For the churches, add a spiritual climate in which Christians are having to learn some fast lessons about life in a land of many faiths and none, where most churches are in numerical decline and three out of ten



## NATIONAL COUNCIL OF CHURCHES IN AUSTRALIA

Australians claim no religious affiliation, where a well-documented yearning for 'spirituality' is matched by a profound alienation from the church.

All this adds up to interesting days ahead for the National Council of Churches in Australia (NCCA), one of the few NCCs in the Asia region that includes the Roman Catholic Church as well as many of the ancient Eastern and Oriental Orthodox churches. The NCCA's spread of programs is indicated by its structure of commissions (Faith and Unity, Mission, Gender, Christian World Service, and Aboriginal and Islander) and networks (Youth, Social Justice), as well as other priorities,

like the Decade to Overcome Violence and outreach to other faith communities, that for the time being have no structural expression.

Like most NCCs, Australia's is seriously under-resourced, and given the financial stringency of member churches it is likely to stay that way. The focus, more and more, will be on the NCCA helping churches do things together rather than the NCCA, through its own limited staff and resources, doing things on their behalf. The year 2002 will find a new leadership team at the NCCA's Sydney headquarters. John Henderson, a Lutheran pastor from Melbourne, assumes office as general secretary. Caesar D'Mello, who arrived in Australia from India via the Philippines in 1980, takes over as director of the NCCA's Christian World Service commission.

Changing times. Now as ever, Australia's churches need the counsel, patience and prayers of good neighbours as they try to find their way ahead.

—David Gill, NCCA General Secretary