

ccanews



New Ecumenical Perspectives

Forty-fifth Anniversary of the Christian Conference of Asia

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New Ecumenical Perspectives



Ahn Jae Woong preaching at the forty-fifth anniversary service

The forty-fifth anniversary is a time to reflect on the past, the present and the future ... and a time to think of what God is asking us to do today

This issue covers a recent program of the Christian Conference of Asia—the forty-fifth anniversary celebration of CCA and the International Symposium on New Ecumenism, held in August in Hong Kong. Around sixty people gathered for this, representing the regional and global pioneers, current officers of the regional ecumenical movement, youth leaders and partners in the civil society movement. There was a good representation from the different Christian traditions within the CCA constituency as well as from the Roman Catholic Church.

It was a time to reflect on the past, the present and the future of the regional ecumenical movement in Asia. It was not only a time to remember what leaders before us have done, but also to celebrate what God has done through CCA through these years. Above all, it was, and it still is, a time to think of what God is asking us to do today at this juncture in the history in Asia.

These past three months have also been a time of building bridges. In June I participated in the sixth assembly of the Asian Conference on Religion and Peace, in Yogyakarta, Indonesia. It was attended by about 300 people from twenty Asian countries, representing all the major religions in Asia. With the theme, 'Asia, the Reconciler', that gathering called for building bridges of reconciliation. Indeed, Asia has been fractured by religious conflicts, although some may be a mere cover-up for what is really economic and political unrest. We need to build a culture of peace, and essential to peace education is learning about and understanding the different religions, ideologies and cultures with whom we share communities.

I also had the privilege of attending the eighth consultation of churches of North and South Korea in July in Japan. This was organised by the Korean Christian Church in Japan and attended by over 130 people, including Japanese Christian leaders and some ecumenical organisations. Seven major churches from South Korea and the Korean Christian Federation of North Korea sent delegations to the meeting. CCA was also represented at the Asia Plenary as well as the Asian Regional Meetings of the WCC Central Committee in late August in Geneva. Meetings like these are a way of networking with the global ecumenical movement and at the same time are an opportunity to share the 'emerging challenges to churches in Asia'. Meanwhile, CCA gathered the general secretaries of national councils of churches and heads of national churches in Asia last June in order to share concerns and consolidate our ecumenical work in the region.

Throughout these forty-five years, CCA has been like an ecumenical ship that has continued to journey on the waters of life in Asia. We have experienced turbulent and stormy weather but we have also experienced the great expectation at seeing the beckoning lighthouse of the harbour. We hope and pray that we can indeed be truthful and faithful to Christ, in whose name we continue to be on this journey.

—Ahn Jae Woong

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New Ecumenism

The Christian Conference of Asia celebrates its forty-fifth anniversary reflecting on ecumenism

Why New Ecumenism?

'What is new about Asian ecumenism?'
'What was wrong with the old?'

These were some of the questions raised at the International Symposium on New Ecumenism held in celebration of the forty-fifth anniversary of the Christian Conference of Asia on 6–8 August 2002 in Hong Kong.

In his sermon during the anniversary service on 7 August, CCA General Secretary Ahn Jae Woong explained the need for 'New Ecumenism' as a way of reclaiming the radical meaning of the essence of ecumenism, the seeds of which had been planted by the pioneers of the CCA, then the East Asia Christian Conference.

'By radical meaning I mean a much wider meaning than our too often narrow one—which is about people, especially the Christians, and, sometimes, the Protestant Christians only.' Ahn Jae Woong called for expanding 'our outlook from being inward-looking within our own Christian family to being outward-looking to others who are our neighbours and part of God's own family'.

'The true meaning of fullness of life has to do with living meaningfully and harmoniously together with all our neighbours, sharing resources together, caring for each other, working together for the common good and for common security. Facilitating this meaningful sharing of life in its fullness is a vital task of the ecumenical movement,' he said.

The anniversary celebration was planned to be a time to reflect on the past, the present and the future of the regional ecumenical movement in Asia.

Three keynote addresses were presented at the symposium, bringing the perspectives of an American theologian, a layman and former general secretary of the CCA/EACC, and a laywoman and present officer of the CCA. Two Asian panels brought together voices from Asia with various perspectives—theology, local congregations, higher education, Roman Catholic, civil society, youth and women.

Religious Values of the Ecumenical Movement

Dr Harvey Cox, one of the keynote speakers and a professor at Harvard Divinity School, asserted that the original purpose of the ecumenical movement remains the same: 'To enable the whole church to bring the whole gospel to the whole world.'

However, it is the understandings of the meanings of 'whole church', 'whole Gospel' and 'whole world' that have changed. According to Dr Cox, the 'whole church' is no longer the Western historic Protestant churches, who were later joined by 'young churches' and Orthodox churches. It now includes other Christians, including Pentecostals and Roman Catholics and all who are searching for ways to include other religious communities.

The 'whole world' is one that is faced with many demanding changes, some of which 'threaten our sense of what it means to be



Thanksgiving service at Ward memorial Methodist Church



Bishop Joseph Zen (RC Church), Dr Ninan Koshy, Dr U Kyaw Than and Dr Ahn Jae Woong



Sr Dr Virginia Fabella and Ms Fedelinda Tawagon

human', Harvey Cox said. He cited new forms of technology such as cyberscience, robotics, body implants, genetics, high mobility and telecommunications, globalisation and weapons of mass destruction as among these jarring changes.

The 'whole gospel' is an affirmation of holistic Christian responsibility (and no more the artificial separation of evangelism and social witness). Integral to it is the clear warning that one cannot serve both God and money.

Recognising religious plurality as an important feature of our rapidly changing world, Dr Cox said that it is in this area in which 'Christians in the West most desperately need the wisdom and counsel of our brothers and sisters in Asia'.

Days of Discovery and Change

Dr U Kyaw Than, a former general secretary of the East Asia Christian Conference (the name of CCA until 1973), recalled the life and work of the regional ecumenical movement during the post-war period. He recalled that the quest for Christian unity always transcended denominationalism (which, he said, was almost accidental).



Dr Hope Antone and Dr David Suh

Kyaw Than said that the movement for cooperation and unity was influenced by the churches' discovery of selfhood as well as the peoples' realisation of national selfhood, especially in line with the growing independence movement in Asia. It was also affected by the collective discovery of Asia not only in a geographical sense but also in social, economic and political senses.

According to Kyaw Than, the ecumenical movement in Asia from early on showed concern for religious plurality in the region. Hence a 1959 statement reads: 'It is evident that religious liberty involves acceptance of the plurality of religions in most nations, and Christians should not in the name of religious freedom claim any right or privilege which they are not willing to grant to others.' The discovery of selfhood was also a discovery of neighbourhood of Asians in all their diversity.

Another point of discovery in the history of the Asian ecumenical movement is, according to Kyaw Than, the discovery of the laity and their vocation to be 'vessels of grace according to the diversity of gifts' granted by God. He likened the laity to the church 'dispersed among the various sections of society, and often working against great odds. Yet in their dispersion a realisation is coming



Dr Harvey Cox, Dr Ahn Jae Woong and Rev. Kwok Nai Wang



Daw Than Myint, Daw Khin Thansi and Dr U Kyaw Than

to more and more Christians in their different professional groups that they are placed there by God to stir them to realise their true calling.'

Negotiating Christian Unity in a Plural World

Speaking on the ecumenical movement of the future, Dr Wong Wai Ching, a professor at the Chinese University of Hong Kong and a president of the CCA, addressed the irony of the dream to be one and the reality of increasing diversity or plurality. She pointed out that globalisation has brought about increased hybrid complexity, so that, 'while everyone continues to live a local life, the ways people make sense of the world are now increasingly interpenetrated by developments and processes from diverse settings.'

For Wai Ching, the globalised world is never one, for it consists of many localities and different self-defined communities. Hence, the task is to cultivate ways to live together as communities of difference.

Wai Ching drew on the biblical story of the tower of Babel (Genesis 11:1–9) to illustrate issues that underlie human conflicts behind the quest for unity: fears of geographical dispersion, linguistic and ethnic diversity, differences of race, religion and culture. In contrast to this is God's design for plurality, and the view that there is divine blessing on diversity.

Issuing the need for negotiating unity in a plural world, Wai Ching offered, among other things, the image of Jesus as a wanderer—ready to 'venture outside of our comfortably stable and fixed territory and meet the others in their "homes"'. Wai Ching concluded that Jesus the wanderer points to a journey of rebellion, resistance, negotiation and striving to be responsible in a world that often denies one's and others' interests and worth.

Asia Panels on New Ecumenism

Two panels by Asian speakers bringing different perspectives were held during the symposium.

Rev. Eric So, general secretary of the Hong Kong Christian Council, spoke on the perspective of local congregations. Highlighting the three-self movement of the Chinese church—to be self-supporting, self-governing and self-propagating—he said that success



Group discussions

in this has not helped churches to overcome denominationalism and the self-centred outlook of churches. It is important for every local congregation to understand that it is not the church but a member of the body of Christ. Challenging the churches to go beyond a self-centred denominational outlook, he suggested the need to have three 'mutual principles'—mutual care, mutual help, and mutual cooperation—in order to honour the name of Christ and build up the body of Christ.

Sr Virginia Fabella, a Maryknoll sister from the Philippines, cited some ecumenical attempts of the Roman Catholic Church, starting with Pope John Paul II's 1995 encyclical. She also cited some post-Vatican II developments that allude to **wider** ecumenism—household keeping or stewardship of all creation—or **macro**-ecumenism—vocation towards unity between Christian denominations and all religions. However, Sr Virginia pointed out, no matter how ecumenism is called (wider, macro, new), there can be no true unity unless women are taken seriously.

Dr David Suh, executive director of the Asian Christian Higher Education Institute, shared the perspective of higher education and suggested some possible areas for working together, especially on international peace and economic justice. One is by directing ecumenical efforts toward expanding interreligious dialogue and understanding and creating an Asian solidarity movement with major Asian religious communities to fight 'terrorist wars against terror' and to work towards peace with justice. Another is by improving relationships with intellectual communities in Asia through contextualisation of theological education and by training younger leaders through a roving institute for Asian ecumenical leaders.

Sharing some theological perspectives on ecumenism, Dr K.M. George, principal of the Orthodox Theological Seminary in India, cited the need to tone down the universalistic notions of theology and mission undergirding the work of the churches and the ecumenical movement. He considers there is also a need to carry out the ecumenical agenda more in local and regional levels, and minimally in a global level.

Using the experience of the National Christian Council in Japan, Rev. Kenichi Otsu, NCCJ general secretary, shared the perspec-



Sr Virginia Fabella and Rev. Park Sang Jung

tive of civil society by pointing to the need for ecumenism to be contextual, issue oriented and based on the need for unity and equality even in diversity. 'Since we Christians in Japan are a tiny fraction in Japanese society, both churches and Christian organisations really need to work together for God's mission with other religions and civil groups,' he said.

The voice of youth and students was represented by Ms Wong Yock Leng, women's coordinator of the World Student Christian Federation Asia-Pacific Region. She cited some of the current efforts of youth and student groups in Asia towards working together on various programs, including the formation of a new structure called EASY Net (Ecumenical Asia-Pacific Student and Youth Network), which includes six youth and student organisations in Asia. There is 'more strength and courage from each other when working together in solidarity in responding to a social issue, more resources could also be shared and we could live out the spirit and essence of Christianity,' she said.

Taking the perspective of women, Dr Rose Wu, director of the Hong Kong Christian Institute, used the biblical story of the Canaanite woman as an inspiration for understanding ecumenical partnership in mission. Acknowledging the churches' outward-

looking concerns against injustice, she called for an inward-looking critique of the churches' new mission field: itself in relation to the women who are not a marginal group in number but a marginalised group in power. She bemoaned the fact that gender equality and the rights of sexual minorities are seen as a threat to maintaining ecumenical unity and partnership. Only when we create a space of negotiation and dialogue to enable the voice of the different other to be heard can the old and oppressive relationships be transformed into more equal and just relationships, she said.

Worship, Bible Studies, Group Discussions

The international symposium began with worship, during which Bishop Joseph Mar Irenaeus, Suffragan Metropolitan of the Mar Thoma Church in India and a CCA president, shared a homily. The second and third days opened with a Bible study in the context of worship, led respectively by Rev. David Gill, pastor of Kowloon Union Church, and Ms Sharon Rose Joy Ruiz-Duremdes, general secretary of the National Council of Churches in the Philippines.

Small-group discussions were built around the keynote addresses, panels and the Bible studies to give participants time to share and contribute to the formulation of new thinking, new perspectives, new directions and new commitments in the ecumenical movement.

Hong Kong CCA members hosted a Chinese dinner to welcome the symposium participants on 6 August. The hosts were the Hong Kong Christian Council, the Hong Kong Council of the Church of Christ in China, the Sheng Kung Hui (Anglican Church), the Methodist Church in Hong Kong, and the Salvation Army, Hong Kong and Macau Command.

The symposium was also a time to celebrate the songs and music of Asia, using the CCA hymnal, *Sound the Bamboo*, a copy of which was given to all participants.

A birthday greeting to CCA was issued by the participants at the close of the symposium. This is available on the CCA website, www.cca.org.hk.

—Hope S. Antone



Cora Tabing-Reyes and Dr S.A.E. Nababan



Dr S.M. Chowdhury and Dr A. Wati Longchar

Guns Silenced in Sri Lanka

A reflection on the peace process

The ceasefire agreement signed between the Government of Sri Lanka and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam has no doubt created a new space in the life of the people in Sri Lanka, instilling new hopes, creating new opportunities and placing new challenges before them. The immediate outcome of this agreement is that the guns have been silenced and in the past few months thousands of lives, of combatants but mostly of civilians, have been saved. Destruction of buildings, people being turned into refugees and fear and anxiety about people's day-to-day security have all ceased. This gives a new breathing space, instills a hope for the future and opens up many new dimensions for working for a lasting solution based on peace, justice and human dignity to all people.

Unlike the earlier agreements, which unfortunately ended in failure, one definitely sees and experiences a greater commitment from both sides to pursue the path of negotiation and dialogue to resolve the issues at stake. These are manifested in the various gestures offered by both sides (e.g. opening the A9 highway), removal of restrictions on the movement of the people etc. The mechanism set in for monitoring the process by an international team is another important feature that is incorporated in this agreement and it has the blessings of the international community. The convergence of all these positive features makes the present space an important, vital and, in some sense, a final chance to resolve the conflict that has plagued the country in the past decades.

We do not expect a basic ceasefire agreement to resolve all the issues that are at stake in the present conflict. We need to be conscious that it is a small step taken in the long and difficult journey of reaching a final political settlement. The danger is for some to become complacent that everything is resolved by the silencing of the guns. We need to be more realistic in our analysis and assessment and prepare people for the complicated journey ahead. That is the immediate task of the church. We need to make people ready for some setbacks and face some hiccups but never to return back to the path of a military solution. We need to see the present climate as a space to act with resolute commitment to build a people's movement for peace in which they will control their destiny. It is vital that the



Faces of Sri Lanka

(Photos courtesy of Jackson/forcten (top right, bottom left), others D'Ambosio/NCCA)



church continues to be a symbol of hope, that peace is possible, that a negotiated political arrangement is the best for all people in Sri Lanka, that violence ultimately is counterproductive and destructive. The church needs to manifest and affirm this hope in spite of the hopeless manifestations that may and can arise from time to time. We need to be the catalysts that instil this unwavering hope amidst people from all walks of life.

Utmost vigilance and prompt action is the need of the hour. People must be empowered to identify and diffuse areas of tension, build bridges of communication across communities and promote the values that sustain a culture of peace in their locality. Structures for safeguarding human rights, democratic governance and the supremacy of law needs to be strengthened in all parts of the country, both in the North and South, for a lasting peace to emerge. All this means that the challenge before us is difficult and costly. We have to move amidst the ordinary people. We may have to sacrifice our privileges. We may be misunderstood and criticised by some sections. We may have to channel our wealth to build bridges of reconciliation among the separated communities.

The metaphor of a bridge is that it connects the two opposite ends and allows people from both sides to walk over it continuously. It bears the weight. It simply facilitates. At the end, the bridge itself does not enjoy the positive fruits that will be manifested on the other side. It is this sacrificial and self-emptying ministry that we need to undertake now. The biblical idea of

peace and reconciliation demands sacrifice. The cross signifies that reconciliation is costly. This is the moment in which Christians in Sri Lanka are called to take up the cross and follow our Saviour Lord Jesus Christ.

It is of vital importance to address the new fears and anxieties that emerge among the people at the present moment. These have many dimensions. What will happen if the process fails? Will it lead to a more aggravated and intense form of conflict? Will we be displaced again? Will the repercussions be severe? These are some of the basic fears that haunt people who have experienced the conflict in its cruellest forms.

There are also the fears and anxieties of smaller minorities about the future. The fears of the voices of dissent both in North and South, the fear of living without the power of weapons, the fear whether this will ease only the economic barriers and be advantageous only to the rich, the fear of the state of human rights and democratic governance, the fear of the unknown! All these haunt people. One of the important challenges is that all these fears, whether they have a factual basis or not, will have to be adequately and immediately dealt with.

The churches and the constituent units of the National Christian Council of Sri Lanka have wholeheartedly welcomed the agreement, but have decided to extend a cautious and critical support. The present moment has placed before us many opportunities and greater challenges where the churches need to be more vigilant and extremely sensitive:

- Fundamentally to be the source of inspiration of hope that peace is possible in spite of the odds that may arise.
- To respond and to act with other religious communities as far as possible. This will make our contribution more effective and add to our credibility.
- To deal adequately with the fears, anxieties and perceptions that prevail in the minds of people. This will mean seeking for alternate models of pastoral care and concern that transcend the traditional pastoral care that has been within the boundaries of the churches.
- To give voice to segments that may be marginalised or ignored in the peace process.
- To constantly promote understanding and reconciliation among different communities, even within the constituency of the Christian community.

All these in practice are difficult tasks. The church needs to play the prophetic role, with all its newer implications. For this to be realised we need to be rooted in a spirituality that will sustain us through this difficult task. It is vital to develop the norms of this spirituality. Obviously it has to begin by first accepting our shortcomings and failures of the past and seek forgiveness from the people to whom we wish to serve. Only then can we fulfil the demands ahead of us in its totality. The fundamental question before the Christian community today is, 'Are we willing to adapt this new model of service and pay the price for the sake of lasting peace in this country?'

—W.P. Ebenezer Joseph
General Secretary, NCC Sri Lanka

Conviction Overturned in Pakistan

Church leaders in Pakistan felt relieved that the country's supreme court overturned on 15 August the conviction of a Christian sentenced to death for blasphemy. Acquitted was Ayub Masih, who had been held since his arrest in October 1996. He was found guilty of blasphemy, a crime punishable by death in Pakistan, after a Muslim alleged that Masih had spoken fa-

vourably of Salman Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses*. However, the court heard that Masih had never made the allegedly blasphemous statements but instead was a victim of a plot to steal his land. The acquittal came after Masih's lawyers brought documents in court showing that the disputed land had been transferred to the complainant. Masih's case became known worldwide when a Roman

Catholic bishop, John Joseph of Faisalabad, shot and killed himself in protest against the sentence on the steps of the court house in which Masih was convicted in April 1998.

Masih's case may provide some hope to those undergoing trial for blasphemy. The Asian Human Rights Commission hopes that it would provide momentum to repeal Pakistan's blasphemy law.

Sexual Assault in the Churches

A challenge and an opportunity for the Christian community

Sexual assault in the church has been in the news lately, disclosing an oft-hidden reality. Everyone should be able to feel safe with clergy, with church workers and in church settings. It is therefore necessary to confront sexual assault when it occurs within the church. Dr Rose Wu, Director of the Hong Kong Christian Institute, offers this reflection, after several child sexual abuse cases in Hong Kong. It was first published in a longer form in the Hong Kong Christian Institute Newsletter Issue 165, June 2002. We reprint excerpts here hoping that the churches will consider the issue deeply. A number of CCA member churches already have protocols dealing with sexual assault.

As a Christian brought up in a reformed tradition, I have always believed that we are all members of one Christian family; we are called to share the joy of life and yet also to embrace our human weaknesses. In this particular case, my concern is how do we translate this experience and understand it as both a challenge and an opportunity for the Christian community to grow into a more faithful community, to affirm justice and to pronounce forgiveness, rather than to view it as an attack that must be defended in order to protect the church's reputation?

The first thing I suggest is that we should not take these cases as independent or accidental happenings. Catholic priests and Protestant ministers have unfortunately been involved in different forms of sexual abuse over a period of centuries in various parts of the world.

The difference is that in the past people were not as socially aware of the problem of such behaviours while, in our time, human societies have become more aware and have affirmed values of human rights and equality, particularly the rights and dignity of children and women, including their right to be free of sexual abuse.

These demands also apply to the present general yearning of people for dignity and human rights protection throughout the world. When the church supports human rights movements in our society and seeks

changes in our government and its policies, we must be brave enough to face our own internal weaknesses and failures and allow space for sincere criticism and challenges in order to seek a true and authentic way to deal with the problems we face from within.

Secondly, we should not simplify such sexual scandals as only about certain priests' individual moral failures or treat such behaviour as a type of sickness. A church is a living community that involves many social and power relationships. We have learned from the domestic violence issue that our society is deeply rooted in a patriarchal culture, that men are 'supposed' to be in control of their wives as they would other forms of property.

As we evaluate the sexual abuse issue now before us, we should widen our perspective to evaluate the church's attitude towards sexuality, including the church's dogmatic views and policies on celibacy, homosexuality and marriage, and how power and authority are exercised in the church, including the power dynamic between priests and the laity.

What worries me is that since the sex scandal erupted in the United States the Vatican has chosen an even more conservative and controlling position on these controversial issues rather than seeking to tackle the root causes of the hegemonic culture that exists within the Catholic community.

Lastly, I would like to suggest three directions for renewal for all Christian communities to grow from this experience. First, we should seek to liberate our clergy from the high expectations we have placed on them as holy and authoritative figures that, in fact, pushes them into more difficult situations, either to believe and pretend that they are perfect while, at the same time, having immense power over lay people or to always feel inadequate to cope with such inhuman demands. The danger is that placing the clergy and laity in such relationships provides an opportunity for abuse. Thus, instead of the current expectations, we should allow our priests and ministers to feel free to exercise their pastoral role in an authentic manner. Secondly, we should alter the current hierarchical model of leadership to a sharing model, which allows the mutual sharing of power and accountability. Thirdly, we should allow more room for discussion and dialogue on different aspects of human sexuality. We should be open to listen and share the vulnerability of our human relationships and the diverse experiences of human sexuality, particularly the socially dissident voices of women and sexual minorities.

A faithful church is a church that dares to embrace our human weaknesses and to repent by seeking changes and renewal from within. By doing so, we can become a truly reborn Christian community.

Ecumenism in Local Congregations

Rev. Kwok Nai Wang appointed as part-time consultant in a new CCA initiative

The future of the church, as well as the ecumenical movement, does not lie in the hands of a handful of denominational leaders but on the participation of local congregations. However, local churches throughout the world, Asia included, are extremely inward looking. The Christian faith has been gravely privatised. All this prevents churches from being actively involved in the ecumenical movement, much less the whole social process.

Therefore, attempts are urgently needed to turn local churches inside out. Ways must be explored to assist local churches to re-discover their missionary and ecumenical nature, and thus, their potentials and commitment to act.

The CCA fully realises this, so in its Executive Committee meeting in May 2002 it resolved to take on a new initiative—Ministry to Local Congregations. For this task, the CCA invited Rev. Kwok Nai Wang as consultant on a part-time honorary basis for four years (July 2002 – June 2006).

Rev. Kwok is an ordained minister of the Hong Kong Council of the Church of Christ in China. Educated at Hong Kong University

and Yale University Divinity School, he served in a very dynamic local church in a slum area in Hong Kong from 1966 to 1977. Then he was elected general secretary of the Hong Kong Christian Council and served in that capacity for eleven years. During his ministry in the 1980s, Rev. Kwok concurrently served as director of Hong Kong Christian Service, chairman of the school management committee and supervisor of a score of high schools of his denomination, and chairman of two Christian hospitals. He is well versed with the pros and cons of church involvement in social services.

In 1988, together with more than 100 Christian leaders in Hong Kong, he founded the Hong Kong Christian Institute, a think-tank cum education centre, and was its director for twelve years. During this period he was considered an important social critic in Hong Kong.

In recognition of his long-standing quest for democracy and human rights in Hong Kong, Rev. Kwok was awarded the Gamaliel Chair in Peace and Justice, sponsored by the Lutheran Campus Ministry in the USA.

Rev. Kwok is a well-known ecumenical leader in Asia. He was dean of the second

Asian Ecumenical Course held in Quezon City, in the Philippines, in 1978. He was the first lecturer of the CCA Ecumenical Lectures Series, held at the Payap University in Chiang Mai, Thailand, in 2001. He lectured frequently in churches and academic institutions in Europe and North America in the 1990s.

Rev. Kwok is a prolific writer. He has written twenty-one books and has edited or coedited a dozen more.

Throughout his ministry of thirty-six years, he always put laity training and the training of pastors on top of his priority list. During his pastorate in the local church, he concurrently served as part-time lecturer in Chung Chi College Seminary (which reconstituted as the Theology Division in 1969). He has also taught in more than 100 local congregations, mostly in Hong Kong.

Having served in this active ministry, Rev. Kwok decided to retire early in order to devote more time to the nurturing of local church leaders. Since 2000 he has devoted his time working with seminary students at the Lutheran Theological Seminary in Hong Kong and pastors of his own denomination.

According to Rev. Kwok, the preparation stage of this new initiative will take approximately one year, during which time he will conduct extensive consultations with colleagues throughout Asia. He will then publish a book on the theory and practice of the local church. From mid-2003 on, he will be available to provide consultations and conduct workshops at the request of local councils and churches. CCA plans to hold live-in workshops for local church pastors in Hong Kong according to demand and the availability of resources.



Breaking the Silence

Women moving from darkness to light in Timor Lorosa'e

At Timor Lorosa'e airport, a big billboard picture of smiling Timorese children announces: 'All together for one future of Timor Lorosa'e. Todos juntos pelo futuro de Timor.'

And leaving the airport, one cannot but notice the big white crosses on top of the hills. They speak of the predominant Christian religion in Timor Lorosa'e. The crosses symbolise the suffering, death and resurrection of Jesus remembered during the Holy Week. Indeed, they symbolise the suffering and deaths of Timorese people from 1975 to 1999 in the hands of Indonesian militia invaders. But they also symbolise their hope to rise above these dark memories so that they can move on to a new future, a new time, now that they have freedom as a new nation after their long struggle.

In this new future, members of CCA are invited to participate, to be in solidarity, to express concretely our being the body of Christ. Thus Rev. Francisco M. de Vasconcelos, moderator of Igreja Protestante Iha Timor Lorosa'e (IPTL) and a CCA

General Committee member, organised a visit on 20–21 July 2002 to Los Palos Imanuel Church, in the easternmost district of Lautem, a five-hour drive from Dili across the hills and along the coast. We were joined by two youth preparing for their ordination, Gerson and Samuel.

Los Palos has a circuit of eight local churches with 1,500 members (400 families), pastored by Rev. Albino Da Costa with the help of lay catechists and elders. They have an active ecumenical relationship with the Roman Catholic Church, holding ecumenical services on special events and discussing among catechists, pastor and priest problems in the villages. They were looking forward to ecumenical study in the villages and to an ecumenical youth work camp in mid-August.

After the worship, where I preached and shook hands with everybody, we had a meeting with forty-five women, young and old. Rev. Albino translated from my English and Rev. Francisco's Tetum and Bahasa Indonesia to Fataluku, the local dialect of Los

Palos. When needed, gestures and facial expressions helped overcome communication barriers.

The women did not talk about personal stories and problems. Instead, as an organised group of traditional weavers, they spoke of their needs. They have a weavers' cooperative initiated by YASONA, the social development arm of IPTL, with Esther Gilarmina as their coordinator. They have weaving skills and a strong spirit but their problem is marketing, not only within the country but also outside. Where and how can they sell their *tais* to help put food on the table and send their children to school? Thus, they want to add to their weaving activities by engaging in buying and selling. They need capital, a facility and a place to do that. They also need management and networking skills—with the other two weavers' cooperatives that were also established by YASONA. They need ecumenical accompaniment for their development!

The young women want guitars and guitar lessons. In their culture, music is used to express their aspirations. They believe having guitars will be good for their youth gatherings. But they are also challenged to have a sustainable income-generating project.

After the visit, we held a two-day women's workshop at the IPTL Centre in Dili on 22–23 July. Twenty women attended, representing three local churches of IPTL—the Church of God, the Pentecostal Church and Bethel ELSADAI in Dili. This was the first time that this had happened, according to them. Within the framework of developing trust, we established the climate of acceptance through introductions and orientation. We used symbols to tell about ourselves, our strengths and how we feel about wanting to grow, to write experiences, to be a light like a candle and to serve God and people. We spoke of having strength because of God's



Meeting at Los Palos Imanuel Church

presence and of being strong like a stone, but also of being simple and basic like a stone to build something good for God. On the other hand, a woman shared that she was 'like a paper with nothing on it. People write on it, get bored, crumple it and throw it away.' At times, we were in silence, empathising with the teary-eyed. At other times we shared in laughter.

The dyadic and big-group sharing of stories of experiences and problems in the home and in the community brought to the surface gender issues of violence against women, prostitution, overwork, women's lack of education, poverty, problems in the family (in communication and in parenting), the creeping Westernisation of culture, health issues such as HIV/AIDS, the need for reconciliation based on truth as expressed by an Indonesian woman who opts to stay in Timor, religious tolerance, living in harmony in the neighbourhood, trauma counselling and understanding the role of women in church and society during this time of nation-building. 'Sisters in Asia, please pray for us!' This is their plea.

We prayed together, reflected on biblical stories of Jesus healing women and having them as partners, reviewed the issues that surfaced from the sharing and discussed the concept of gender, though very briefly. They shared the situation and program priorities of women in their churches. In most churches not all women are able to attend activities because of preoccupation with traditional practices and ceremonies such as weddings and funerals, which take much of their time and limited money. Towards the end of the workshop, the women decided to work together for fellowship, prayer and study and formed the 'Persekutuan Wanita Kristen se Timor Lorosa'e (Fellowship of Christian Women in Timor Lorosa'e), with the following elected committee:

- Chairperson: Frederika Thomas (Hosana, IPTL)
- Vice Chair: Leocadia de Jesus (Ekaristi, IPTL)
- Secretary: Lidia L. Malana (Bethel)
- Members:
Palmira Maria (Pentecostal)
Maria da Costa (Pentecostal)



Women's workshop

- Adelaide L. Dias (Church of God)
- Maria Dolores (Church of God)
- Maria Simoes (Zebaot, IPTL)
- Sri Yane Pello (Hosana, IPTL)

The visit initiated the coming together of church women from Dili to listen to one another and send their message to sisters and brothers in Asia. 'It is a healing experience to be together, breaking our silence,' one participant said.

They were able to go past denominational barriers. However, we did not have

Roman Catholic women in this meeting. From what I learned in Bishop Belo's Centre for Development and Peace, the Catholic women are not organised yet. Sr Bernadita Guhit, a Filipina religious, shared that the Roman Catholics are reorganising. At the moment their preoccupation is on policy regarding amnesty about which Bishop Belo had a pastoral letter.

'God is light and in God there is no darkness at all.' (1 John 1:5b)

—Cora Tabing-Reyes



Officers of the Persekutuan

Becoming Christ's Body

*In the second of the CCA Ecumenical Lecture Series,
Fr Aloysius Pieris speaks on the Holy Spirit*

Fr Aloysius Pieris, a renowned Jesuit theologian from Sri Lanka, delivered two lectures on 'Ecumenism and the Unfinished Agenda of the Holy Spirit' to an audience brought together by the Christian Conference of Asia, the National Council of Churches in Sri Lanka and the Ecumenical Institute for Study and Dialogue on 23–24 July 2002 in Colombo.

The second of the Ecumenical Lectures Series initiated by CCA last year, the two lectures were based on the affirmation, 'I believe in the Holy Spirit,' which Pieris described as providing the missionary agenda of the church: holiness and catholicity, and communion with all holy persons.

Highlighting holiness and catholicity as marks of the church, Pieris stated that holiness exists wherever God's presence is found. But even a temple, meant to be holy, can be turned into 'a den of thieves' when the 'money-demon' usurps Yahweh's place.

'Thus holiness is intimately connected with the renunciation of Mammon, the absolutised capital. This means that evangelical poverty advocated for all disciples of Christ in the Sermon on the Mount is not an optional extra for those seeking perfection but the basic qualification to enter and serve in God's reign,' he stated. This means that 'a holy church is essentially a poor church, that is a church that has visibly renounced Mammon's rule for the sake of God's reign,' he added.

Pieris developed his insights of Jurgen Moltmann's *The Church in the Power of the Spirit*, especially Moltmann's argument that the church is holy in its poverty. This involves two types of poverty described by the two versions of the Beatitudes: 'poor in spirit' according to Matthew and 'the poor' according to Luke. The former means those



Fr Aloysius Pieris

who have become poor voluntarily for the sake of God's reign ('the detached ones'). The latter means the 'dispossessed ones' or those who have been forced to be poor under Mammon's rule.

'While the detached ones seek and find God's reign, it is God's reign that seeks and finds the dispossessed ones. The first renounce their own riches, the second denounce their own poverty. Their common struggle finds a holy alliance only in a reign of justice. It is this holy alliance that constitutes the communion of saints, to which the churches are called to testify in word, deed and lifestyle. In no other way can a church call itself holy,' Pieris stated.

Aware that the vast majority of Asia's poor in both categories are non-Christians, Pieris claimed that 'the Spirit that is poured out on all flesh has been animating the non-Christian body of Christ'. It is Christ who 'gathers both the renouncers of Mammon and the victims of Mammon as his own corporate person,' he said. Here lies the serious dilemma between the church's claim to be the body of Christ and Christ's claim that

the victims of nations are his, his person, his true body (Matthew 25:36ff). To solve the dilemma, Pieris suggested that the church must identify itself with such victims and become one body with them so that it may become one body with Christ.

He sees catholicity as 'a oneness which is so prolifically creative in the Spirit as to purge the churches of all homogeneity and uniformity as a violation of their holiness'.

In his second lecture, Fr Aloysius Pieris focused on reconciliation and justice as important components in the discourse on sin and salvation. He critiqued the tendency to take Pauline theology of sin and justification without complementing it with Jesus' praxis of dealing with sin and sinners. Using Jurgen Moltmann's *History and the Triune God*, Pieris said there has been a focus on the perpetrators of sinful actions and their forgiveness to the neglect of the suffering of the victims. This has completely ignored 'God's judging and saving' "option for the poor"', he quoted Moltmann.

Pieris explained the mandate to baptise and make disciples of nations as the mission of liberation directed to the poor, broken hearted, captives, blind and oppressed. It is not proselytism or conversion from one religion to another but a *metanoia*—changing one's ways or abandoning slavish dependence on anything but God (i.e. idolatry). In God's reign, no other god is allowed to rule. In the Bible, idolatry is associated with injustice because God is God of the oppressed.

The next series of CCA ecumenical lectures will be in Jorhat, Northeast India, with Dr Judo Poerwowidagdo, a theologian from Indonesia and current President of the Asian Christian Art Association, as lecturer, scheduled for 28–30 October.

—Hope Antone

Towards a Common Future



More than 150 people, including thirty participants from Tanzania, South Africa, Senegal, Egypt, Lebanon, Myanmar, Thailand, the Philippines, Korea, China, Hong Kong, India, Sri Lanka and Pakistan and two observers from the Netherlands and Switzerland attended the program on Asia–Africa beyond Globalisation on 25–27 June in Bandung, Indonesia.

Bandung was a historic place for this meeting as it was in Bandung that the conference of Asian and African states met on 18–24 April 1955 in order to respond to the Cold War and where the seeds of the nonaligned movement were planted.

In his keynote speech, the former President of Indonesia, Abdurrahman Wahid, spoke of how important it is for the countries of Asia and Africa to be independent and to release themselves from the strong hands of other countries. He said that there is no escape from globalisation, and neither can we continuously blame those powerful countries. Instead, Asians and Africans have to face globalisation independently

with great self-reliance. He cited the example of China, which is able to provide its people with inexpensive food and clothes.

Other speakers focused on international policies related to globalisation, which are unfair to Third World countries, and on issues of terrorism and interreligious cooperation for peace and justice.

The participants reaffirmed the significance of revitalising the Spirit of Bandung for people of Asia and Africa and other nations who advocate independence and freedom. Having been subjects of colonialism historically, many Asian and African countries are now finding themselves being victimised by the negative impact of globalisation. Hence an alternative just and peaceful world is envisioned through the spirituality of a common future.

The Spirit of Bandung is not the spirit against certain powerful countries, faiths or groups. It is the movement towards a common future of human beings who seek peace and justice for all. It is based on the belief that all human beings are equal and that people have the same basic human rights.

It is a movement against economic globalisation—a situation that has brought about suffering, misery, famine and millions of deaths, especially among children and women.

In their communiqué, participants called for, among other things, a serious implementation of economic, social and cultural rights that would enable countries of Asia and Africa to develop their own people-centered economies. This includes debt cancellation (of illegitimate debts), a campaign for payment of historical, social and ecological debts, and a call for transforming the IMF, World Bank and WTO into more democratic agencies.

Participants also called for the settling of all disputes through conflict resolution and dialogue because, as history teaches, war never resolves any dispute. They also called upon all Asian and African nations to establish just and democratic institutions, implement all UN resolutions and adopt all human rights declarations in order to eliminate all forms of discrimination, which fuel conflicts and violence.

What Is EASY Net?

Young people lead the way in Catholic–Protestant relationships in Asia

Composition

EASY Net is a network for students and Youth in Asia-Pacific, consisting of six member organisations as follows:

- CCA Youth (Christian Conference of Asia)
- IMCS Asia-Pacific (International Movement of Catholic Students)
- IYCS Asia (International Young Christian Students)
- WSCF Asia-Pacific (World Student Christian Federation)
- YWCA (World Young Women Christian Association)
- YMCA (Asia-Pacific Alliance of YMCAs)

The objectives of EASY Net are to:

- promote ecumenical dialogue and co-operation within EASY Net,
- share problems, perspectives, visions and hopes among students and youth in Asia-Pacific,
- enhance information sharing capacity between student and youth groups in Asia-Pacific,

- provide space for student and youth groups to experience intercultural and interreligious solidarity,
- extend cooperation and collaboration to other youth and student groups and network in the region as well as at a global level.

You may ask why EASY Net promotes 'grass-roots ecumenism' and what exactly this is. Here is a brief explanation.

Process

Ecumenical meetings between some or all of the above groups over many years have fostered trust and understanding. Perhaps this can be traced back to the Ecumenical Global Gathering of Youth and Students (EGGYS) held in 1993 in Brazil. This was the first students and youth gathering at the global level since the 3rd World Conference of Christian Youth in 1952 in India and most of the EASY Net member groups participated. Linked with this event was another meeting in Asia called ASYG (Asian Students

and Youth Group), held parallel with EGGYS in 1993 in India. After this first regional ecumenical gathering, there were quite good ecumenical relationships among those regional groups. Then after long discussion and a process of building understanding, another gathering was held in 2000, the Asian Students and Youth Gathering (ASYG 2000) in Thailand.

After this gathering, five regional organisations discussed how to maintain and extend the relationship at national level. The suggestion was for national movements to form ecumenical teams to share common problems and discuss plans for working together.

In each country in the region, after reaching a common understanding among the groups, one national coordinator is appointed by the national ecumenical team. This is a person who is in a leadership role in their movement and below 30 years old, who initiates meetings, arranges programs and acts as contact person. Actually this is



Masao, front right, at the creative writing workshop in Manila

Masao's Story

I grew up in the Catholic Church until high school. After I entered university, I joined the SCM, which is called 'Student YMCA' in Japan. This was my first opportunity to relate with Protestants. At the beginning, I was asked many strange questions about the Catholic Church, but I could not answer. So, I started to study Catholicism more deeply. Later, I joined many activities in the YMCA and NCC because senior friends encouraged me to join. Finally, I was invited to the NCC Japan General Assembly by the former Youth Secretary of NCCJ. But I was afraid there would be no space for Catholics because the Catholic Church is not a part of NCC in Japan. My friend said, 'No problem, because you are already a member of the Student YMCA.' I was really happy with this flexibility. As personal friends, it is easy to relate with different people from other denominations, but not in terms of structural relationships. This is our limitation but we should confront this problem and keep providing some space, especially for young people.

I often ask myself: Who is getting advantage from this situation of a divided church?

not an easy process in many countries, but it is a necessary process for building understanding among the different local and national movements.

Knowing each other better and building cooperative relationships makes the process of developing ecumenical leadership and promoting ecumenism in each movement easier. Through this process each local member is able to learn about Jesus from other member organisations' perspectives. Through exchange programs, members can identify more with their own movements and themselves with ecumenical reflection. Each EASY Net Ecumenical Team can develop ways to discover and work on common issues in the local context. It is hoped that this will not only be 'issue centred' but also involve reflection and sharing and experiencing 'what ecumenism is'.

Program

Presently, there are some common programs at the regional level, such as the Asia-Pacific Students and Youth Week (APSYW) and the solidarity camp. The Asia-Pacific Students and Youth Week was formerly

known as Asia Youth Week and had a long history of being organised by CCA Youth until last year. From this year, the name of the program has been changed and it is being opened to any students and youth in Asia or the Pacific. This will be a good opportunity to get together and become close friends. A resource book for APSYW will be distributed soon.

A creative writing workshop was held in Manila in May, which was a wonderful opportunity for sharing together dreams, vision, strategies and creative reflections. Another program is the solidarity camp. An East Timor solidarity camp was planned, but unfortunately the local hosts were not ready yet because of the situation in that country.

It is hoped to have many common programs at the local level. It is expected that local movements will invite other EASY Net partner movements to their own programs, and that individuals' friendship, respect and understanding will become wider and deeper.

Trust and Communion

Sometimes, people say, EASY Net is not *easy*. It is called EASY Net because we should 'take

it *easy*! It seems that the situation of the world is getting worse and students and youth nowadays feel so powerless. In this situation ecumenical movements may sound like another burden to them and young people are often seeking more immediate comfort.

But for young people, this is the right time to identify, reflect upon and consolidate their vision of the future. The ecumenical movement is a good way to learn from each other, to unlearn indoctrination and go beyond restricted boundaries in our thinking.

Through encountering others of the same generation but different denominations, young people may build trust among themselves and extend the community of 'communion' in the world. Of course there are many misunderstandings that confuse young people. But those misunderstandings are also important first steps in knowing each other better.

If you have any comments or suggestions, please contact easyenet@catholic.org.

—Masao Koide,
Coordinating Secretary

Youth Empowerment Program for Bangladesh



Ayouth empowerment program brought together twenty-five youth from all over Bangladesh to Dhaka on 1–5 July. It was organised jointly by CCA and the National Council of Churches in Bangladesh. In his inaugural speech, NCCB President

Sudhir Adhikari challenged the participants to social reflection towards achieving life in all its fullness for all.

He mentioned that capacity building is important but it should be according to the needs of the present day and within a value

system. He encouraged the participants to utilise the workshop as a magnifying glass to open their perspectives. He cited areas of capacity building, drugs, HIV/AIDS, terrorism and information technology as priorities.

Of the youth participants, about 40 per cent were women and 40 per cent came from rural areas. The program included sharing of personal history as social history, input on leadership, partnership of women and men, contextual social analysis and drawing up of action plans.

Among the common concerns of the Bangladeshi youth were the need for skills development, especially in English speaking and writing, the need for staff at NCCB for youth work and the need to focus on interfaith and interreligious initiatives towards peace building and harmony.

Ecumenical Disability Advocates Network in Asia

Ying-Bo Joseph Tsai has been appointed by the WCC as the coordinator for Asia of the Ecumenical Disability Advocates Network (EDAN). At the General Committee meeting in Taiwan, CCA affirmed that it will work hand in hand with Ying-Bo to ensure that all our churches respect, appreciate and utilise the gifts of people with disabilities.

Ying-Bo is looking for a core group and country coordinators to work with him to speak out for accessible worship and church premises, publication of Braille Bibles, interpretation for the deaf, rewriting of Bible stories for people with intellectual disabilities and other activities to more fully involve and include people with disabilities within the life of the churches. 'Every human being has gifts,' says Ying-Bo. 'We are not disabled people, we are whole people but differently abled. There are blind orchestral conductors and lawyers, people with Down syndrome who actively make the community a better place. We all have gifts to share. We are all made in the image of God. Let us appreciate God's creation. Everyone has different abilities to contribute to the community.'

Ying-Bo is from Taiwan, and has a mobility disability. He was inspired by Rev. Chen, a pastor who used a wheelchair ('Not wheelchair bound,' says Ying-Bo) and who actively conscientised churches in Taiwan on the issue. Ying-Bo worked with him. 'Twelve years ago, when I began working with Pastor Chen, people with disabilities had a hard time and didn't go out much. We tried to negotiate with the government for legislation on our rights. Now in government enterprises one in fifty employees must be a person with a disability and one in 100 in private enterprise. If a company does not want to employ a person with a



Ying-Bo Joseph Tsai

disability, they must pay an amount to the government that goes to a foundation to improve the lives of those with disabilities. There have been improvements in accessibility in Taiwan over the last ten years, as in Japan and Hong Kong.'

In each of our countries there are still walls of exclusion, prejudice and ignorance to be taken down, brick by brick

The ecumenical movement has long taken the inclusion of those with disabilities seriously. The 1975 Nairobi WCC Assembly strongly stated that 'the church cannot exemplify "the full humanity revealed in Christ", bear witness to the inter-dependence of humankind if it continues to acquiesce in the social isolation' of those with

disabilities 'and to deny them full participation in its life ... the question about the place for people with disabilities within the churches is a theological issue.' EDAN was formed at the Harare WCC Assembly in December 1998.

Ying-Bo will find much interest around the region as many churches are actively grappling with these issues. In Myanmar, for example, Rev. Smith Za Thawng, general secretary of the Myanmar Council of Churches (MCC), reports that the MCC is actively engaged in this issue. Ms Ja Bu, who is theologically trained, coordinates the work of MCC Differently Abled program on a full-time basis, drawing together a network.

A number of churches in Myanmar have highly recognised schools for people with disabilities, especially for the visually impaired and the deaf. Braille computers were popularised in Myanmar by a doctor of philosophy who was made blind in an explosion in a chemical laboratory. He later finished his theological education and many others with whom he studied became Christians because of his example.

In each of our countries there are still walls of exclusion, prejudice and ignorance to be taken down, brick by brick. EDAN seeks to help remove those bricks and to ensure that the church is a place of welcome for all, fostering and enjoying the gifts of each one of the people of God.

Ying-Bo is eager to hear from those with disabilities who are keen to be disability advocates. He can be contacted by email at josephb@giga.net.tw, by phone on 886-7-7169916 and at 3F-2, No. 2, Lane 3, Der-An St, Lyn-Ya District, 802 Kaohsiung City, Taiwan. Within the CCA Dr Prawate Khidarn will foster the network.

—Mandy Tibbey

Call to Combat HIV/AIDS

South Asia consultation challenges churches to address the worsening HIV/AIDS situation in the region

Representatives from South Asian countries held a joint consultation on 'An Ecumenical Agenda to Combat HIV/AIDS in South Asia' in Colombo, Sri Lanka, on 22–26 July, jointly organised by the Christian Conference of Asia and the World Council of Churches.

The participants expressed concern about the worsening HIV/AIDS situation in the region, which is fuelled by illiteracy and poverty, gender disparity, stigma, discrimination and denial, a high incidence of sexually transmitted diseases, low condom access and use, extensive commercial sex, injecting drug use and the movement of populations.

They expressed dismay at the lack of an adequate response from the institutional church and its role in contributing to the stigmatisation of those living with the virus.

However, the group affirmed that the church, as the community of God's people in Christ, where each is loved and accepted, has a unique and powerful role to play in offering spiritual sanctuary, solace, forgiveness, restoration, hope and peace in the

midst of the HIV/AIDS crisis. The church needs to address issues of sex and sexuality, promote interfaith and intersectoral action and undertake interventions and capacity building for action.

In order to overcome stigma and discrimination, churches are called to end their judgmental tendencies, recognising that all are in need of forgiveness. Churches are also challenged to include people living with HIV/AIDS in program planning and implementation. They could also campaign for access to treatment and drugs, advocate comprehensive care, provide counselling and spiritual support and create public interaction between church leaders and people living with HIV/AIDS.

Further, churches are challenged to break the silence and go beyond cultural taboos in order to approach topics of sex and sexuality in a more positive and non-judgmental way, recognising the need to include gender justice in church teaching and practice. Such topics must be incorporated wherever possible in the curricula for clergy training and in Sunday schools.



CCA President, Bishop Irenaeus, lights a lamp to commence the consultation



Participants share their concerns



Strengths and Concerns

Heads of national councils meet

In order to analyse global trends and their impact in Asia as well as review ecumenical tasks and seek new paradigms for social transformation, the Christian Conference of Asia gathered the general secretaries of national councils and national church leaders on 17–21 June in Hong Kong. Countries represented were Aotearoa New Zealand, Australia, Hong Kong, India, Japan, Cambodia, Korea, Laos, Myanmar, Pakistan, the Philippines, Thailand and Timor Lorosa'e.

Helping with analysis of global trends was Prof. Kumar David, a professor at the Polytechnic University in Hong Kong, who described the world situation in broad strokes, identifying three important socio-economic trends.

One is the implementation of global economic policies such as liberalisation of trade, privatisation, deregulation of industries and social service, which are mandated by powerful nations accompanied by the need to militarily protect their interests. Another is the quantum leaps in science and technology, which challenge our long-held moral and ethical values. And third is the rapid and irreversible degradation of the environment.

CCA General Secretary Ahn Jae Woong gave a brief summary of CCA history and its founding principles, and showed its links with the worldwide ecumenical movement, and the importance of developing an ecumenism that reflects Asian realities and Eastern wisdom and ethics.

In his presentation, Rev. David Gill, pastor of the Kowloon Union Church, said the main task of the ecumenical movement is to make the churches help each other together to become the church Christ wills it to be. Hence, ecumenism is a movement rather than a set of structures. It is a movement for renewal of churches to move forward to be salt and light in the world. It



requires practical outcomes, not just discussions.

Dr Rose Wu, director of the Hong Kong Christian Institute, spoke from the interface between civil society and institutional church. She proposed some paradigms for social transformation, which include a return to the spirit of Sabbath and to being free from political politics and the trap of holding on to political power.

Three Bible studies, led by Rev. Smith N. Za Thawng of the Myanmar Council of Churches, Rev. Kwok Nai Wang and Rev. Lee Ching Chee (both from Hong Kong) served as reminders of the biblical imperatives for peace and for an option for the marginalised and powerless.

Following the sharing of national reports, the group affirmed the common strengths of the NCCs: as channels for united



witness and a common understanding of the gospel that takes Asian realities seriously, for the flow of ideas, and for efforts to respect and dialogue with other faiths.

The group also noted their common concerns for greater need to serve the church to understand and embrace the full mean-

ing of *oikoumene*. They cited the inadequate financial resources for programs and insufficient resource sharing among councils and a lack of upcoming ecumenical leadership.

They shared concern for strengthening relationships with other Christian groups.

They shared the need to grow closer relationships and increase information exchange between national and regional ecumenical councils. They also shared special concerns for the countries of Timor Lorosa'e, Myanmar, Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia and Nepal.

Enhancing Mission and Ecumenism in Indochina

Of the remaining five declared socialist countries in the world, four are located in Asia and two belong to Indochina—Vietnam and Laos. Although the countries of Indochina have been undergoing tremendous transformation, the legacy of war, isolation and the growth of fundamentalism have left the people there needy, broken and hurt. Hence, the CCA has placed the countries of Indochina among its priority areas.

On 23–27 June, the CCA-JID collaborated with the General Board of Global Min-

istries and General Board of Church and Society of the United Methodist Church—USA in holding a consultation on 'Enhancing Mission and Ecumenism in Indochina' in Siem Reap, Cambodia.

At the end of the meeting, participants from Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar and Vietnam made the following recommendations for:

- pastor/clergy formation schools with specific curriculum that will equip them for church leadership, biblical and theological studies,

- courses on ecumenism and interfaith dialogue for clergy and laity,
- training in agriculture, animal husbandry and other livelihood programs,
- resources for delivery of clean and adequate drinking water in villages,
- health and healing ministries, especially in the area of HIV/AIDS, hunger and malnutrition,
- pastoral care and training in peacebuilding and conflict transformation.

Forthcoming Events

Joint Ecumenical Formation

One expression of partnership between the Christian Conference of Asia and the Federation of Asian Bishops Conferences is the Joint Ecumenical Formation, which is jointly planned, organised, funded and participated in by representatives of the two bodies. The program aims at fostering closer partnership between Roman Catholics and Protestants in local congregations. The program will enable church leaders, including young leaders, to study and discuss together church history, ecumenism, theology and the mission of our churches. This year the JEF is set for 2–12 September in Hualin, Taiwan, hosted by the National Council of Churches of Taiwan.

Conference on Terrorism in a Globalised World

CCA, the World Council of Churches and the National Council of Churches in the Philippines are jointly organising the 'Internation-

al Ecumenical Conference on Terrorism in a Globalised World', on 23–26 September in Manila. The gathering is aimed at understanding the US 'war on terror' and stimulating theological reflection on the intertwined issues of globalisation, terrorism, peace and security in the Asia-Pacific region. It also seeks to promote international advocacy and networking and drawing up alternatives on peace and conflict resolution.

South Asian Youth Empowerment for Transformation

The South Asian Youth Empowerment for Transformation (SAYET) 2002 aims to bring thirty youth leaders from India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh together for an intensive certificate course on 1–21 October 2002 in Nagpur, India. Sessions will include leadership skills development, history of the ecumenical youth movement in

Asia, social analysis, contextual Bible studies, exposures and drawing up of action plans. The program aims to empower youth leaders for social transformation by equipping them with tools of social analysis and new paradigms of Christian youth leadership.

NCC Youth Secretaries' Meeting

The youth secretaries of the national councils of churches in the region will meet on 12–17 November in Bangkok for sharing of youth activities and concerns. One of the concerns is how to integrate youth work and the youth movement towards achieving CCA Youth's focus on leadership development, ecumenical formation, and movement building.

(There will more news of these programs in future issues of CCA News.)

From Far and Wide

*We continue our series introducing the members of
CCA's General Committee*



Kenichi Otsu

For Rev. Kenichi Otsu ('Kenichi' or 'Ken' to friends) ecumenism is not limited to Christians but should encompass all people with other faiths and in other civil society movements. As general secretary of the National Christian Council in Japan, Rev. Otsu thinks that the ecumenical unity being sought is not so much accomplished in the number of forums being held but in the working together and dealing with life's issues. It is through sincere commitment to issues, making a stance on issues and working together with other groups that the churches and Christians in Japan have earned some respect from the people, he says. His commitment includes peace and justice work in Japan as well as promoting common witness and solidarity in mission with other places outside Japan. He speaks of the work for peace and justice as not only opposing the powers that be but also building a culture of peace. During his free time, Rev. Otsu enjoys going to the countryside for relaxation.

William J. K. Lo

Before becoming general secretary of the Presbyterian Church in Taiwan, the Rev. William J. K. Lo was program secretary of evangelism of the PCT, a pastor of a local church, then associate general secretary of PCT. He speaks of the broadening of his evangelical perspective and the depth of the Christian mission through the Kaohsiung incident in 1979, which resulted in the arrest of demonstrators involved in human rights, peace and justice work in and for Taiwan. Born on human rights day, William Lo believes that Christian life is to take sides with the powerless and voiceless. 'Where there is injustice, we need to continue to struggle to actualise God's will for all of humankind.' He regards the life of Jesus as the model of true witness to our faith that 'we exist not only for ourselves but always for others and that in everything we must trust God'. William Lo writes columns for daily secular newspapers on church involvement in the search for national identity, peace and justice and democratisation. His hobbies include meditation, listening to classical and sacred music, taking walks, and reading and writing.



Chuleepran Srisoontorn- Persons

Dr Chuleepran Srisoontorn-Persons is an ordained minister of the Church of Christ in Thailand. She holds degrees in philosophy, theology and psychology of religion. Her PhD thesis at Boston University was on 'Religion, Culture and Personality'. She teaches counselling and world religions at Payap University. She is also actively involved in counselling people living with HIV/AIDS. She considers her time with them a learning experience on true forgiveness, on valuing life and on the deeper meaning of happiness. She speaks of counselling as a way of serving God as well as with God. 'I am not doing it by myself. God works with me, God listens with me, God speaks with me. It is a mystery and I believe in it.' Chulee feels that among CCA's challenges today are the need for peace and reconciliation, gender justice and the need to conduct programs that build up community. Her hobbies include reading and singing.

Smith N. Za Thawng

Rev. Smith N. Za Thawng, known in the ecumenical movement as 'Smith', is the current general secretary of the Myanmar Council of Churches. He started his ecumenical involvement with the Student Christian Movement as national secretary and later as a standing committee member of the World Student Christian Federation Asia-Pacific Region. A minister of the Baptist Church, Smith also served a local church and then became associate general secretary of MCC until his election as general secretary in May 2001. He likens the life and ministry of the churches in Myanmar (Burma) as being 'wise as serpents and loving as doves'. He describes the faith of the Burmese Christians as being more mature and vigorous under suffering, sustained by the hope that the situation is transitory and enabled to look beyond the present. Smith loves singing and music and has composed around twenty religious songs.



Kim Dong Wan

The Rev. Kim Dong Wan recently finished his eight-year service as general secretary of the National Council of Churches in Korea. Prior to that, he served as NCKK human rights director and then as a pastor of the Methodist Church. During his term as NCKK general secretary, he worked for peace and reconciliation of North and South Korea, and for improving interreligious relations with other Christian groups as well as other faith groups. He speaks of his passion for peace and justice as something that began during his seminary days when he saw the self-immolation of a friend who was protesting against unjust labour conditions. Moved by that action, he began visiting factories and studying about labour situations and consequently became involved in urban-rural mission work. His involvement in the democratic movement of Korea brought him to jail but has not deterred his commitment. Even in retirement he continues his concerns for freedom, reconciliation and peacemaking and especially the new issues involving migrant workers and refugees. Given more free time, he says, he hopes to do some mountain hiking and fishing.

Closer Relationship

Following the mandate from the Tomohon Assembly to 'seek closer working relationship with Evangelicals, Pentecostals and Roman Catholics in serving God in Asia', three CCA representatives participated in a dialogue with the Evangelical Fellowship of Asia and World Vision on 12–13 July in Chennai, India. The CCA representatives were Mr Anthony Row, a member of the CCA presidium, Rev. Govada Dyvasirvadam, a member of the CCA General Committee and general secretary of the Church of South India, and Dr Wati Longchar, Joint CCA-WCC Consultant for Ecumenical Theological Education.

Others present at the meeting were Rev. Godfrey Yogarajah, Rev. Richard Howell and Rev. Wong Kim Kong of the Evangelical Fellowship in Asia and Dr Saphir Athyal, Mr John Mathai and Mr Franklin Joseph of World Vision.

In order to strengthen mutual understanding, relationship and cooperation in Christ's mission in Asia, the nine representatives of the three bodies agreed to constitute the Asia Coordinating Committee for Christian Cooperation (ACCC).

ACCC is a forum whose mission is to strengthen mutual understanding, relationship and cooperation of churches and Christian bodies in Asia of different traditions and theological persuasions towards fulfilling the mission of Jesus Christ. The forum will strive to enhance understanding and practice of our common Christian convictions on issues related to Christ's mission in Asia, and to encourage local, national and regional cooperation and partnership in responding to critical needs in Asia.

The group identified the following concerns for possible common joint actions: religious fundamentalism, terrorism, child abuse, domestic violence, poverty, globalisation, HIV/AIDS, suffering and persecution, peace and reconciliation, and capacity building.

—A. Wati Longchar

NCC Japan: Towards Solidarity in Mission

The list of thirty-three member and associate member churches and organisations participating in the National Christian Council in Japan (NCCJ) listed below is a clear indication that solidarity in mission is vital for not only churches in Japan but also for other Christian organisations. NCCJ member organisations include those related to international networks—such as the YMCA and the Fellowship of Reconciliation—and those uniquely Japanese—such as the Christian Political League and the Japan Christian Medical Association. The network to which NCCJ relates, including the Christian Conference of Asia (CCA) and the World Council of Churches (WCC), enables Christians in Japan to stand in solidarity with people and partner churches throughout Asia and other parts of the world. Consultations among NCCJ and other councils of churches in other countries have emphasised issues of minority discrimination, human rights, peace and justice.

Cooperation among Christians is essential as they are a small minority in Japan (slightly less than 1 per cent). Although the number of Christians is small, there has been an impact on Japa-

nese society by Christians in the areas of education, social welfare, human rights and social concerns.

NCCJ continues to work ecumenically (e.g. with the Japanese Catholic Bishops' Council for Justice and Peace) as well as with NGOs, citizens' groups and with people of other faiths in the area of peace. Recently there has been an inauguration of the Interfaith Network for Peace (made up of Buddhists, Christians and Muslims) to unite to maintain Japan's Peace Constitution and oppose the 'emergency' legislation that would allow Japan to participate in a war and to arm itself. The emerging nationalism in Japan is one of the many concerns for NCCJ. Pray for NCCJ as they continue to struggle with others to work for peace and justice.

The NCCJ office in Tokyo is located on the second floor of a rather old seven-story building known as the Japan Christian Centre. There is also the NCCJ Division of Christian Education in another office on the same floor in the Japan Christian Centre. The NCC Centre for the Study of Japanese Religions is located in Kyoto. Established in 1960, the Study of Japanese Religions promotes interreligious dialogue through seminars, publications, and study

National Christian Council in Japan

Member Churches

Anglican Church of Japan (Nippon Sei Ko Kai)
Japan Baptist Convention
Japan Baptist Union
Japan Evangelical Lutheran Church
Korean Christian Church in Japan
United Church of Christ in Japan (Nihon Kirisuto Kyodan)

Member Organisations

Association of Christian Kindergartens
AVACO—Christian Mass Communications Centre
Japan Bible Society
Japan Christian Culture Society
Japan Christian Medical Association
KYOFUKAI—Japan Christian Women's Organisation
(established 1886)
National YMCA of Japan
National YWCA of Japan

Associate Member Churches

International Christian University Church
Japan Free Methodist Church
Kobe Union Church
Tokyo Union Church
German-speaking Evangelical Church
Tokyo Seisho Shukai of Mukyokai Group
West Tokyo Union Church
Yearly Meeting of Religious Society of Friends
Yokohama Shukai of Mukyokai Group
Yokohama Union Church

Associate Member Organisations

Asian Health Institute
Christian Political League
Fellowship of Reconciliation
German Midnight Mission
International Christian Body
Japan Christian Academy
Japan Christian Council for Evangelism with the Blind
Mission 21
Tomisaka Christian Centre



The kanji character 'shin', which means 'belief' in Japanese. The women saw the empty tomb and believed (Matthew 28:8–10)

programs. The Christian Literature Centre is located at another building in Tokyo. NCCJ is underresourced and struggles financially since churches in Japan tend to be small and have their own financial constraints. The Tokyo office of NCCJ consists of a limited staff who somehow manage to do the work of these various committees listed below:

- Ad-Hoc Committee on Bio-ethics
- Buraku Discrimination Committee
- Commission on Faith and Order
- Committee on Disabled People and the Church
- Peace and Nuclear Issues Committee
- Women's Committee
- Yasuki Shrine Committee
- Youth Committee
- Urban Rural Mission Committee
- Human Rights of Foreign Residents Committee (this committee works closely with the Christian Coalition for Refugees and Foreign Migrant Workers, which shares office space at NCCJ)
- International Affairs Committee
- Committee on Humanitarian Aid to DPRK (North Korea)
- Chernobyl Project
- China Church Relations Committee
- German Church Relations Committee
- Philippines Committee



An ecumenical flag, once torn apart to symbolise the divisions among churches and of the world, was woven up with a chain of ribbons with participants' wishes and thoughts of the ecumenical movement at the closing worship of the NCCJ ecumenical youth event on 24 March 2002

NCCJ works ecumenically with other churches, denominations and organisations. It works closely with the Roman Catholic Church through the Catholic Bishops Council for Justice and Peace on peace issues, prayer services, the abolishment of the death penalty etc. It works with the Salvation Army (through the work of the Women's Committee), the Church of Christ in Japan, the Reformed Church in Japan, the Japan Orthodox Church (work with sending medical supplies to Chernobyl) and the Nazarene Church. NCCJ also works with Buddhist groups, citizens' groups, and various NGOs who support peace.

Historical Origins and Present Major Concerns

NCCJ's present name is 'Nihon Kirisuto Kyo Kyogi Kai' in Japanese. Although the present NCCJ was formally established in 1948, there was a prehistory of church union among the Protestant churches since the early part of the twentieth century. The movement toward unity accelerated especially after Japanese Christians attended the 1910 World Missionary Conference in Edinburgh. Thus, in 1922, the beginning of the NCCJ was known as the 'National Kirisuto Kyo Renmei', which promoted church union from 1925, established a Church Union

Committee in 1939 and formulated a United Church proposal in 1940.

Ultimately, however, the militaristic imperial government played a major role in actualising church union. The National Mobilisation Law of 1938 and the Religious Bodies Law of 1939 imposed strict controls on all religious organisations. The latter law was used to bring all branches of all religions, except Shintoism, the 'state super-religion', declared non-religious by the government, under a single integrated organisation to facilitate totalitarian control.

Japanese authorities threatened, harassed, and arrested ministers and laypersons under the harsh Public Order Preservation Law. In order to survive, Protestant denominations hastened to sever ties with overseas parent mission boards and, under government pressure to act quickly, formed one Protestant church, the United Church of Christ in Japan (called 'Kyodan'). The union took place in 1941 without sufficient preparation or theological consensus concerning church order and a confession of faith. All Roman Catholics were organised into a similar body. The Religious Organisations Law of 1939 reflected the Imperial Constitution and Imperial Rescript on Education, which declared that Japan was ruled by a 'god incarnate' of Shinto pedigree in a 'line of emperors unbroken

for ages eternal'. Christian churches were allowed to confess their faith if they showed loyalty to this emperor. Even so, the Japanese government was very suspicious of Christians and oppressed them in various ways. Even before the Kyodan (the United Church of Christ in Japan) was formed, many church leaders accepted the state Shinto as a 'super-religion' and revered the emperor although there were some who did not and were arrested.

Pastors who were interrogated by the Japanese military police were often asked this question, 'Who is greater? Jesus Christ or the Emperor?' If the pastor answered 'Jesus', the pastor would be taken to prison and tortured. If the pastor answered 'the Emperor', then the pastor would be mocked for not answering as a Christian pastor should. The questions could also be quite tricky, such as, 'If Jesus and the Emperor were both drowning in a river at the same time, who would you save first?' (One clever pastor answered, 'Whoever is closest to me.')

To the later shame of many Christians, some church leaders even urged Christians in Korea and Taiwan, Japanese colonies, to accept shrine worship, which brought much suffering to the Christians in those countries. The Kyodan at that time, attempting to rationalise Japan's atrocities, sent a let-

ter to Asian churches that interpreted Japan's military expansion as historical progress and God's will. Later, in 1967, the Kyodan (which is the largest Protestant denomination in Japan and now a member church of NCCJ) issued a 'Confession of Responsibility during World War II' stating, 'We seek the mercy of God and ask the forgiveness of Asian neighbours for mistakes committed in the name of the Kyodan at the time of formation and during the war years.'

With this history in mind, NCCJ has continued to encourage Japanese churches to take responsibility for Japan's atrocities—through confessing any war responsibility and protesting against the rewriting of textbooks that distort the truth regarding the atrocities (such as the so-called 'comfort women' or military sex slaves). In the area of human rights, NCCJ has been able to make an impact on Japanese society particularly with regards to discrimination against Buraku, Koreans and other foreign residents and foreign migrant workers, and rights for the disabled. NCCJ has three committees that work on these issues: the Buraku Discrimination Committee, the Human Rights of Foreign Residents Committee and the Committee on Disabled People and the Church.

The Buraku, although Japanese, have been systematically discriminated against since the Tokugawa Shogunate (1603–1868). At that time Japanese were divided into four occupation-related social strata—samurai, farmer, artisan and merchant. Persons not included were the emperor, who was on the top, and the 'non-persons' on the bottom, called 'Buraku'. The Buraku were assigned specific jobs that were 'unclean' according to Shinto and Buddhist concepts in society, e.g. the slaughter of animals, tanning of animal hides and burial of the dead. Because of the system of family registry in Japan, it is possible to know if one's ancestors were Buraku and, hence, be discriminated against today.

NCCJ has continued to promote church union, peace issues and international cooperation. The Commission on Faith and Order has been promoting theological dialogue between Catholic and Protestant churches in Japan. This includes jointly



Yoshifumi Murase, second from left, shares his experiences and views of the ecumenical youth movement, as Park Akhiya, left, and Rev. Renea Nishihara, second from right, listen, at the first session of the youth event on 'Unity and Diversity in the Youth Ecumenical Movement' on 21 March 2002



Leaders and members of Christian, Islam and Buddhist communities in Japan gather together for the inauguration of the Interfaith Network for Peace in Tokyo on 2 April 2002, as Ms Reiko Suzuki, moderator of the National Christian Council in Japan, speaks to the audience about the causes of war and peace from a Christian perspective

observing the Day of Prayer for Christian Unity together with the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Japan as well as studying and sharing with different denominations the response to the WCC's Lima Liturgy.

The NCCJ Women's Committee sponsors the annual World Day of Prayer, which is celebrated by 250 ecumenical groups throughout Japan.

The NCCJ Peace and Nuclear Issues Committee has been working on the abolishment of nuclear weapons and expressing concern over nuclear power plants in Japan and the waste from these plants. The committee has published a series of pamphlets on nuclear and peace issues and is very active in lobbying the government. The Christian Network for Peace has also been formed and now there is an Interfaith Peace Network as well. The emerging nationalism in Japan affects the world globally and NCCJ protests against the visit of the prime minister to the Yasukuni Shrine and the Emergency Legislation Law, which goes against Japan's Peace Constitution. NCCJ voices its opposition through letters, rallies, interfaith prayer services, demonstrations and advertising campaigns in newspapers.

The International Relations Committee has these committees: Committee on Hu-

manitarian Aid to DPRK (North Korea), Chernobyl Project, China Church Relations Committee, German Church Relations Committee and Philippines Committee.

The Committee on Humanitarian Aid to DPRK (North Korea) has been working with WCC and UN agencies in the area of emergency food aid to North Korea through bodies such as UNICEF and World Food Pro-



Clement John of the World Council of Churches expresses concerns over Afghan refugees in Tokyo on 11 March. Second from left is NCCJ General Secretary Kenichi Otsu and third from left is CCA General Secretary Ahn Jae Woong

gram to the Korean Christian Federation. Fund-raising is also part of the International Relations Committee and proceeds go to emergency relief, development projects in cooperation with other ecumenical bodies such as the Christian Conference of Asia and to support human rights advocacy work.

Globally NCCJ continues to work with issues such as the world debt relief (Jubilee 2000), the abolition of land mines, and climate change.

The present staff at NCCJ in Tokyo are:

- Rev. Kenichi Otsu, General Secretary,
- Rev. Toshimasa Yamamoto, Executive Secretary for International Relations,
- Ms Akie Hatazawa, administrative assistant for the General Secretary,
- Ms Mikako Nishihara, Executive Secretary for Peace and Nuclear Issues Committee and for the Women's Committee,
- Rev. Hidefumi Kitani, Executive Secretary for Youth Committee, Urban Rural Mission Committee, Human Rights of Foreign Residents Committee,
- Ms Shin Hee Maeng, accountant.
- Volunteers helping with JCAN (Japan Christian Activity News—the NCCJ English newsletter) are editors Rev. Claudia Genung-Yamamoto and Mr Hisashi Yukimoto.

—*Claudia Genung-Yamamoto and Toshimasa Yamamoto*

Jenny Dawson

The Rev. Jennifer Dawson is an Anglican priest who works for her church, the Anglican Church of Aotearoa, New Zealand and Polynesia, in the Diocese of Christchurch as their Ministry Educator, involved with training and education work with individuals and with parishes. She is particularly concerned with the training of people for ordination and ongoing training of clergy, but she also works with lay people and with whole parishes, especially in responding to the changing context. She is also involved in much ecumenical work in Christchurch area. Jenny is on a number of national committees of her church. Its new structure with its three strands is now only ten years old, and much time



in the Anglican national life is spent working out how to be a just church, taking seriously the primary place of the Maori people, but also looking at the three-way partnership, between the Maori, the pakeha and people from the islands of Polynesia, which is unique in the world.

Jenny comes from a rural background, in Canterbury in the South Island. Part of her experience in growing up in a country area was that many things happened between the churches and it was natural to work together. This is still very much a part of her life now when she works with rural churches. She had some years away from the church as a teenager, but came home to Anglicanism later. After she left school she went to university and teachers' college and trained as a teacher. The next twelve years involved marriage and children, and in those years she was involved locally in women's Bible groups and nationally with the writing of the New Zealand Anglican

prayer book. Her love of words, poetry, language means that she enjoys creative liturgy. Now she has three adult children, two of whom live in Christchurch, and one who lives in Melbourne, Australia. Her husband Jim is a history lecturer at Lincoln University, outside Christchurch. When not working, Jenny's interests are gardening and tramping (hiking) and she is a really keen landscape painter.

In the 1980s Jenny trained for priesthood, and was ordained in 1989, but she had studied theology in mid-1970s as a committed layperson, obtaining a theology diploma. She is now working on a master's degree in ministry and is also training to be a spiritual director, helping people to deepen their faith. Jenny tries not to spend all of her life sitting in church meetings but actually to do something about the centre of what we are really on about.

Jenny believes we are at low point in some ways in terms of ecumenical organi-

sation at present, both at the level of the WCC as well as her own Conference of Churches of Aotearoa New Zealand, and that commitment is down on what it was twenty-five years ago, but she is still convinced that local church people are doing more with other local churches than they ever were before. There is a greater level of openness within the Christian world and the big challenge for us now is interfaith issues, extending ecumenism even further so that all people of faith can come together, whatever the faith is. This, she feels, something we've hardly begun to come to think about. We need to do theological reflection about what it is to be ecumenical and to engage the widest possible issues.

Jenny's involvement with CCA began when she went to the Manila Assembly in 1990. Because of her commitment to justice issues she was thrilled with the opportunity to go to Philippines, and the women's forum, and became passionate about Philippine issues. She was elected to the general committee and felt privileged being part of CCA, with its move to HK and in gender issues. The dimension of ecumenism that is really important to her is that it is a network of friends and building friendships across all forms of barriers.

For the future Jenny considers diversity will continue to be a challenge for us. We have developed quite strong relationships with the Catholic church and we are trying to develop links with evangelicals, but increased diversity and relationships with others across boundaries is important. Interfaith dialogue has to be part of the future of CCA, a reality for the many of us who live in multifaith situations.

—Geoff Alves

Miriam Shows the Way

Sharon Rose Joy Ruiz-Duremdes

Recently, I was reading the CCA Quarterly Report. I got excited about one line on page 13. I don't know how many people who read the CCA Quarterly Report really get excited but, with this particular issue, I was. That line was: 'Imaging new models of ecumenical leadership and structure within the discussion of new ways of being church.'

Nothing can be more appropriate than new models of ecumenical leadership for a time when CCA is scanning the horizon for a new ecumenism. Through this biblical reflection, I wish to remind us of a particular kind of leadership that has been debated on around ecumenical circles, which CCA claims it is practising but which stands in need of internalisation so that it becomes a way of doing things. I wish to refrain from referring to it as feminist leadership because feminism is grossly misunderstood by many and I do not have the time to make a treatise on feminist theology. I shall leave that re-education to the unit on Formation, Youth Empowerment and Gender Justice.

The story of Miriam comes to mind when I think about a new model of ecumenical leadership. We all know that Miriam had a prominent position in the spiritual and political life of Israel. She modelled a zest for life and warranted the love of the people as a leader.

In Micah 6:4 Miriam is listed as an equal with two men. She is credited for assisting in the liberation of the people from slavery. After the flight from Egypt, Miriam, the prophetess, takes a timbrel in her hand, begins singing and all of the women go out after her with timbrels and dancing.

Singing, shaking the timbrel, and dancing are holistic expressions. They involve all of a person's faculties—body, mind and spirit. It is a sad commentary on life that traditional leadership emphasises scholar-

ship, which is founded on philosophical systems that, more often than not, are head-trips. Everything must be objective. 'Do you have any ideas?' is the usual question. The question is seldom, 'How do you feel about this situation?' It is rather unfortunate how much the ecumenical movement is becoming more and more an academic exercise. Take a look at our programs—consultations, symposiums, colloquia, conferences, forums etc. This penchant for ideas gives me a feeling that immersion in life is a distraction to formulating policies and plans. How unfortunate that ideas and situations are seldom, if ever, brought into a dynamic dialogue with each other, making processes quite static and lifeless.

Miriam dances before the Lord and the women go out after her with timbrels and dancing. It is their song that Miriam sings because she is immersed in their circumstances. They sing **their** song from the inner recesses of their life situation. They express who they are in the most comprehensive manner.

In Numbers 12:2 Miriam and Aaron ask a very sensitive question: 'Has the Lord spoken only through Moses? Hasn't God also spoken through us?' Why would such a question be raised? At the start, the people recognised the leadership of Moses, Aaron and Miriam—all three on—an equal footing. Had there been a change in Moses' leadership style? Had Moses become autocratic? Was he threatened by shared leadership? How we need shared leadership in the churches and in CCA. I do not refer to merely having women, clergy, lay and youth members in the presidium. Having such representation does not ensure that sectoral concerns are consistently lifted up and translated into programmatic expressions and processes within the CCA. History has clearly made that point.

Let us remind ourselves that leadership within an organisation that professes to be the promoter of the alternative is the leadership of ordinary folks—not necessarily of the personalities. In many ecumenical circles, the centre stage is peopled mostly by experts—what we call professional ecumenical leaders. We seem to forget that common folks led the Jesus' band. I was painfully made aware of this when I sat in the search committee for the general secretary. The discussion revolved around academic degrees, past positions, books published, papers delivered and global recognition. I really wondered if Jesus himself would qualify for the post. If we are looking for new models of ecumenical leadership, we must ask ourselves what leadership the simple folks of our churches exercise in the affairs of CCA? To whom do we listen?

The story of Miriam progresses to a rather unusual episode. Aaron and Miriam are punished for their critical attitude. More accurately, Miriam is stricken with leprosy for asking a rather subversive question. As a woman, I am wont to ask why was it only Miriam became a leper. Why was Aaron not smitten by the disease? We can pile up theological justifications for the happening and, perhaps, satiate our appetite for scholarship. But I see a blatant reminder projected in the story. Being critical and expressing one's critical analysis of a situation involves risk. This is probably why many of us and our churches fear the consequences of being more prophetic. It is true that our particular contexts determine our responses to circumstances. That, however, is no excuse for preferring the safe and the comfortable.

In Holland there is a quaint seaport where most people get their living from the sea. Life is difficult in that area because sometimes the fisherfolk cannot put out to sea because of the fog. Sometimes they are

out there at sea and find it next to impossible to return. The fog is so thick that they cannot see where they are going. The fisherfolk have devised a system whereby they find their course by turning their boats rapidly in circles—until the waves rock any buoy in the vicinity. Then they stop, listen and repeat the procedure until they hear the buoy clang. They then navigate toward the clanging buoy. By making waves, they find where their course lies.

It is only when we make waves and take the risks that come with making waves will we be able to find our course. A boat that stays in the harbour never encounters dangers, but it also never gets anywhere. The ecumenical movement in Asia will benefit from leaders who have the courage to mainstream the alternative, even at great cost. It is the fundamentally new and better that the people of Asia are hoping, praying and struggling for. It is interesting that the people did not set out on the march until Miriam was brought in again. Only after she joined them did they commence the journey. Why was Miriam so well loved? Because she was consistent. She did not take a repressive condition sitting down, nor did she allow it to immobilise her. She never reversed her position. In season or out of season, she lived her life in the way she knew she should, even if it caused temporary isolation. Her standpoint was not determined by what was popular or convenient.

Would to God that the Christian Conference of Asia would engender and nurture leaders who are thoroughgoing advocates for the sidelined and the excluded. Would to God that the Christian Conference of Asia would truly be a fellowship of and for the 'sinned against'.

Let the ecumenism that we recite and re-enact:

be expressive of all that we are ...
 be inclusive of those who are on the underside ...
 be imbued with the courage to challenge the accepted and reverse the familiar ...

(Sharon Rose Joy Ruiz-Duremdes is general secretary of the National Council of Churches in the Philippines)

Korea

Dr **Heup Young Kim**, professor of theology at Kangnam University in South Korea, has been elected the first chairperson of the African Asian Program for Science and Religion. Its vision is to achieve the welfare and harmony of humankind in Africa and Asia in the fields of science and religion for better health, deeper spirituality, wider vision and harmonious growth to humanity in the multireligious, multicultural and multi-racial contexts of Africa and Asia. It seeks to do this through workshops, creative research, effective teaching and the publication of books and journals, among others. Kim is the author of *Christ and the Tao*, a forthcoming book to be published by CCA.

Taiwan

The Rev. **Lin Tzong-jeng** (Lim Chong-cheng), pastor of Ho-chin Presbyterian Church in Tainan City, was appointed associate general secretary of the General Assembly of the PCT. He succeeds the Rev. Dr **Hwang Po-ho**, who has become principal of Tainan Theological College. Rev. Lin is currently moderator of the Tainan Presbytery and head of the General Assembly's Committee on Church and Society. For many years he has been active in the democratisation movement in Taiwan. He served as director of the university campus ministries centre in the Tainan region. Recently he entered into the movement for spiritual renewal.

Japan

Bishop **James T. Uno**, the Bishop of Kitakanto for four years, was installed as the 17th Primate of the Nippon Sei Ko Kai (NSSK, or Anglican Communion in Japan) on 30 May. Prior to becoming bishop, he was a parish priest and school chaplain in the diocese of Osaka. His sincere hope is that in this changing world Christians can continue to work for peace and unity in the name of unchanged Lord. His predecessor, Bishop **Furumoto**, is back to his diocese of Kobe and will retire by the end of March 2004.

Lee Oo Jung

1923–2002



Dr Lee Oo Jung, former vice-president of the National Council of Churches in Korea, passed away on 30 May, only two months away from her 79th birthday. An ordained Presbyterian elder, she will be remembered for her strong leadership in the ecumenical and the women's peace movements. In the struggle for human rights and democratisation in South Korea, she devoted herself to the movement for democracy and promotion of women's human rights, living under constant surveillance and frequent detention and interrogation by the forces of oppression. She was instrumental in realising the South and North Korea Women's Meeting in May 1991 on the theme 'Peace of Asia and Women's Role'. In so doing, she activated the women's peace movement and helped to open the door for dialogue between women of North and South Korea, thereby promoting reconciliation and reunification of the divided Korean people.

Dr Lee was professor of theology at the Hanshin University and Seoul Women's University. Over the years, she was president of the PROK National Church Women's Association, Korea Church Women United and the Korean Association of Women Theologians. She was vice chairperson and advisor of the Evangelism Committee of the World Council of Churches. She was also chief director of Women Making Peace and advisory member of the Millennium Democratic Party.

—KNCC

Thramu Rosy Maung

1948–2002

Thramu Rosy Maung, a dedicated ecumenical educator from the Myanmar Baptist Convention, passed away on 7 August. With degrees in science, religious education and Christian education, she worked in the Department of Christian Education of the MBC for twenty-six years as a curriculum writer, associate director and then director. In 2002 she became a lecturer in Christian Education at the Myanmar Institute of Theology. She played an important role in emphasising and developing the idea that Christian education was an essential ministry of the church. She led Christian education lab school trainings all over Myanmar and built up the Daily Vacation Bible School. She encouraged the starting up of early childhood centres in the churches. She began the work of HIV/AIDS education in the Myanmar Baptist Convention till the work was taken over by a newly formed commit-

tee. She was very much involved in women's issues and was chairperson of the Sunshine Centre for Women, an educational facility for girls and women at risk.

Thramu Rosy was a member of the Myanmar Council of Churches' Education and Communication committee and the CCA's Christian Education committee. Before her death she was planning to open an early childhood development centre at MIT to serve the Aung Kyaw Gone community and to give practical training for MIT students.

Thramu Rosy married Mahn Joshua Thein Tun in 1982. Her motto was, 'I was born to serve the Lord.'

—Anna May Say Pa

Agustina Lumentut

1937–2002

The Rev. Agustina Lumentut of Indonesia, named as one of ten outstanding women in the ecumenical movement by Margareth Kirk in *Let Justice Flow*, WCC 1997, died recently, aged 65. Ordained in 1959, she was the first woman president of her

church, serving two terms, 1989–1996, and deputy general secretary of PGI, 1985–89. She served on the Central Committee of WCC and the General Committee of CCA. During the conflict in Central Sulawesi in 1998–2000 and 2001 she played a mediator's role and always promoted peace among all communities. Until her death she served as chairperson of the Communion of Churches in North and Central Sulawesi.

Mona Saroinsong, Coordinator of the Sag Sulutteng Crisis Centre of the synod, called the Rev. Lumentut 'a true pastor and servant of God' and 'an ecumenical hero in Indonesia'.

Yoon Ki-Youl

The NCC Korea mourns the sudden death of its president, Rev. Yoon Ki-Youl, on 6 July. He was 61. Rev. Yoon was also moderator of the Evangelical Church of Korea (ECK). The funeral service was held under the auspices of the Evangelical Church of Korea at the Pusan Nam-cheon Jungang Church, where he served as senior minister for many years.

Dalit and Minjung in Dialogue

The fifth Dalit–Minjung Dialogue, held on 14–19 August 2002 in Seoul, Korea, focused on the theme, 'Dalit and Minjung in Search of Fullness of Life as Victims of Globalised Economy'.

In a joint statement, Dalit and Tribal theologians from India and Minjung theologians from Korea identified the globalised market economy as the human-made evil that systematically exploits third-world countries. This globalised market economy deprives people of their livelihood, alienating them from the resources of mother nature and divesting them of their native cultural identities. The 'bodies' of women are commodified and the rich native cultural heritages are infected with individualism and cut-throat competition.

In Korea, the Minjung are suffering from unemployment, unstable employment and poverty. The Minjung of North Korea are

starving because of the global political-economic exploitations. The lives of the Minjung of both North and South Korea are threatened due to the heightening of military tension in the Korean peninsula caused by the United States. In India, the market forces have found the Brahminic ideology of exclusion as the natural ally to oppress the Dalits and the Tribals through the recently stepped-up scourge of Hindu fundamentalism. The resultant consolidation of the caste-based social hierarchical system further excludes the victims from having their legitimate share of political, educational and employment opportunities.

The theologians affirmed their task to participate in the life-seeking struggles of the people by identifying, affirming and promoting the humanising religio-cultural resources in their respective soils. 'With the spirit of contemplative openness, we desire

to be seated at their feet to be gripped by the wisdom of the theologico-spiritual powers emerging from the tears of their eyes, sweat of their bodies, dance of their limbs and the music from their hearts. We decide to further listen to their silent cries to be interrelated with their co-humans, the cosmos and the divine, as a single family bound with love and life,' they stated.

They called upon the churches to repent for their lack of concern and their neglect in sharing and redistributing their resources with the poor. They called on the churches to join hands with the struggles of the Tribals, the Dalits and the Minjung.

Since 1997, Minjung and Dalit theologians have met four times for the Dalit–Minjung Dialogue, an idea that arose as a result of the First Congress of Asian Theologians (CATS I). The four dialogues have been held alternately in Korea and India.

Prayer for Peace of Humankind

The following prayer was used during the week of common prayer for the reconciliation of North and South Korea, held on 23–29 June. The NCKK Reunification Committee called on the churches and all Christians to participate in the campaign 'A Minute's Prayer a Day' for each day of the week. Since 1997, the committee has declared 25 June as a 'Day of National Reconciliation', recalling the tragedy of the nation's internal strife since the Korean War in 1950.

O God,
In this world you create,
We see violence and wars every day.
We see assault, plunder, abuse, expulsion, killing and
human trade.
We see conflicts among tribes.
We see terror, retaliation and wars among nations.
We see many people being killed and expelled from
their land.
We see many people wandering to find a place to live.
We see desolated nature and the impoverished living
environment.

O God,
We confess the violence is in us.
We attack, exclude, blame and hurt our neighbours
with our language, social position, political power,
and relationships.
We oppress women, neglect children, ignore the poor,
and abuse foreign workers.
We pollute and damage nature thoughtlessly.

O God,
Please forgive us!
Please be within us and let your peace fill this world!
Please be with us and give us a thirst for peace!
Please let the river of peace flow within us!
Please stop wars and conflicts!
Please make us peacemakers!
Please strengthen and encourage us to stand against
all kinds of violence and wars!
We pray in the name of Christ Jesus, our Lord.
Amen.



'Shalom' by Kim Young Lee (Korea) (from 'Christian Art in Asia' by Masao Takenaka. Used with permission.)