



Christian Conference of Asia

cca news



Serving
together beyond
boundaries

Asia Sunday
2004

Interfaith
cooperation to
fight HIV/AIDS

Basic ecumenical
course

Human rights
in Asia

Volume 39 • Number 1 • March 2004

Serving together beyond boundaries



Cover artwork by Chris Tamaela from the worship resources for the Ninth CCA Assembly in 1999

The theme is a timely reminder of what we are called to do and to be—as churches and as ecumenical bodies

Asia Sunday is an important part of the life and mission of CCA. This year marks the 30th year of Asia Sunday, which was started to commemorate the birth of CCA, then the East Asia Christian Conference, in 1959.

Every year, Asia Sunday focuses on a theme and on a country in Asia. This year's theme is 'Serving together beyond boundaries', and the focus is on Laos.

The theme is a timely reminder of what we are called to do and to be—as churches and as ecumenical bodies.

In Asia, most people live within so many boundaries that they seem like compartmentalised lives. Among the boundaries are religious, denominational, territorial, ethnic, sociopolitical and ideological. There is a tendency to confine ourselves within these boundaries so that we can never imagine crossing over them, much less breaking them down.

Through Asia Sunday 2004 we wish to share that serving together is a step towards demolishing all kinds of boundaries and going beyond them. By serving together we build solidarity with others and together witness to our God.

Asia Sunday is a meaningful time of seeking God's grace and of joining with God's plan to transcend all boundaries. Through this we can participate in the building of justpeace communities in Asia. We hope that churches will set aside 23 May as Asia Sunday or any other day as Asia Prayer day as it will give an opportunity to renew our commitment to serve together beyond boundaries.

There are stories in this issue on Christian–Muslim dialogue, HIV/AIDS, ecumenical formation, and youth leadership formation, among others. They make very interesting reading. These are issues and concerns that not only impact churches and societies in the region but are also high on the CCA agenda.

The report on CCA-WSCF Asia-Pacific region consultation is a reflection of CCA's deep commitment to the ecumenical student ministry and to the partnership between the two ecumenical organisations. The partnership began in the early 1960s. Between then and now, several consultations and other events have taken place, good examples of a successful ecumenical cooperation between churches and the student Christian movements at national and regional level.

Preparations for the 12th General Assembly of CCA have begun. The 31 March to 6 April 2005 assembly in Chiang Mai is expected to gather some 400 people from different parts of Asia, Pacific and outside. From this issue till the run-up to the assembly, we will keep you informed about the assembly preparations and related matters. The back cover page of this issue contains the poster of the assembly on 'Building communities of peace for all'.

—Abn Jae Woong

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Serving together beyond boundaries

Celebrate Asia Sunday 2004

Once again the Christian Conference of Asia invites member churches, councils and ecumenical partners and friends to celebrate Asia Sunday, 23 May 2004

Asia Sunday is a commemoration of the birth of CCA, then the East Asia Christian Conference, on 24 May 1959. Since 1974, CCA has set aside the Sunday before Pentecost as Asia Sunday. It is an occasion to highlight a major concern of CCA and to foster solidarity among member churches and councils, ecumenical partners and friends.

This year, Asia Sunday falls on 23 May 2004. However, churches are free to set aside any day of their calendar year as Asia Sunday or Asia Prayer Day. For example, in Bangladesh where Sunday is not a holiday, Asia Prayer Day was observed on a Friday, 6 June 2003. It does not really matter when it is scheduled. What is important is that a day each year is set aside for an act of solidarity with Asian churches in their various struggles, and of partnership with and ownership of the life and work of the ecumenical movement in the region through CCA.

Serving together beyond boundaries— why this theme?

- To use the texts of the Revised Common Lectionary for 23 May 2004: Acts 16:16–24, Psalm 97, Revelation 22:12–14, 16–17, 20–21 and John 17:20–26.
- To pray with Jesus for unity (John 17:20–26).
- To celebrate glimpses or foretastes we have had so far of this dream for unity.
- To confess the obstacles and hindrances that we have caused on the journey to unity.

Serving—a response to Christ's call to discipleship through servanthood and also a response to human need. Serving unites people more easily than theological and doctrinal dialogues. Serving entails humility and sacrifice.

Together—in recognition of our need for one another and the fact that we cannot do the work alone. Serving reaps more when it is done together, not individually or competitively. By serving together, we recognise the worth, ability, role and contribution of one another and we value the image of God in each other.

Beyond boundaries—Serving together is not only for and with those we like or who like us, especially those within our own circles.

The kind that facilitates wider unity is serving beyond boundaries—serving others, even those outside our usual circles, and especially the least of God's peoples. By serving beyond boundaries we affirm the width, depth and breadth of God's wondrous love; we affirm that God is truly the God of the whole *oikoumene*—the universe being the household of God.

The format

- The format is not a fixed liturgy but seeds or ideas for a liturgy, Bible study or sermon. This is to respect churches' own liturgical formats as well as liturgy planners' creativity.
- The format incorporates an interreligious approach or openness through quotations from sacred writings of various religious groups. Included are the Bible of Christianity, Qur'an and some Hadith of Islam, Dhammapada of Buddhism, Atharva Veda and Rig Veda of Hinduism, and Baha'i writings. This is to venture into interreligious dialogue and to recognise the many ways of recognising the Divine, God, even through various sacred writings.

Invitation for special offering

This year, we encourage churches to make a special offering for the Lao Evangelical Church in Laos, a young member of the Christian Conference of Asia. This special offering will be used to help the ministry of the church in a country that shares with the rest of Indochina the legacy of the Vietnam War. The US bombing during the war lasted nine years (1964–1973), making Laos heavily ordnance infested. A special offering for the Lao Evangelical Church is an act of solidarity with a young member of the Asian ecumenical movement.

Translation and distribution

We would like to invite member councils and churches to translate the material into local languages or dialects. Please disseminate it widely to local churches.

After your celebration, kindly share with us what you did, whether the material has been useful to you and what your suggestions are for the next year's observance.

—Hope S. Antone

A challenge and an opportunity

CCA general secretary urges ecumenical movement to work for people's aspirations

Dr Ahn Jae Woong, CCA general secretary, has called for nurturing and promoting ecumenical virtues in the non-Christian milieu in Asia today.

Speaking at a symposium on 'Ecumenical Movement in the 21st Century—Challenges and Opportunities' organised by the Hong Kong Christian Council (HKCC) as part of its 50th anniversary celebrations, Ahn Jae Woong said that the way of life of ecumenically responsible people who are 'God's people living with our neighbour' should be one of 'confessing together, witnessing together, working together, sharing together and living together in harmony'.

The symposium was attended by more than 100 church leaders, intellectuals and social activists in Hong Kong. HKCC is a member of CCA.

The CCA general secretary felt that one of the tasks of the Asian ecumenical movement in the 21st century was to commit itself in solidarity with people's aspirations in the region. He said that there was space for ecumenical agencies to intervene and work with people to fulfil their aspirations, like the Korean people's aspiration for unification, the Moro people's aspiration for self-determination, the Myanmar people's aspiration for democracy and people in

general in Asia for their aspiration for conflict transformation, freedom from economic domination and freedom from all forms of persecution.

'Organising people power for radical changes in public policies and authoritarian regimes is an opportunity for ecumenical movements to identify with people's aspirations,' Ahn said.

He recalled the people power that brought about democracy in Korea and the Philippines as examples of the power of truth and goodness gaining victory through the efforts of the ecumenical coalition playing a major role in fulfilling people's aspirations. According to Ahn, the ecumenical movement has a

responsibility to give special attention for providing education to local congregations on wider church perspectives. Ecumenical leadership formation, ecumenical ministerial formation and ecumenical theological formation are necessary for carrying out the ecumenical task at local, regional and global levels.

'The whole question of oikoumene should become a priority of the Asian churches,' he added.

Ahn called on those who are in the ecumenical movement to constantly seek for God's intervention, God's wisdom, God's guidance, and God's engagement for fullness of life for all the people of God.



Ahn Jae Woong, CCA general secretary at the symposium, and on his left Eric So, HKCC general secretary

Christian–Muslim dialogue

Conflict transformation and the study of peace

An interreligious conference held in Bangkok 8-12 December gathered more than 30 participants from around 15 countries, spanning three continents. It brought together some well-known Muslim and Christian thinkers and committed practitioners, all bound by a common vision of conflict transformation with the goal of achieving peace.

It was a three and a half days of intense discussion that always began with a collective Muslim–Christian spiritual reflection. These daily encounters where the group reflected and shared on the Word of God from the Qur'an and the Bible set the tone for each day's sessions.

The conference, organised by the Christian Conference of Asia, the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences and the Asian Muslim Action Network, focused on conflict transformation and the study of peace. As such, paper presentations, sharing of local models and efforts, as well as consequent discussions, centred on the theme.

The conference started with laying the ground or the context, namely the causes of conflicts in Asia today. Fr Rudi Heredia and Dr Chandra Muzaffar provided key ideas and insights that propelled the group into a deeper analysis of factors that give rise to hostile relations within and among groups and nations.

Sharings were made by participants, who came from conflict-ridden areas in Asia such as Indonesia, Afghanistan and the Philippines.

They shared with the group their methods and strategies of conflict transformation from their experiences and as applied to contemporary Asian realities.

Sharing on local models and concrete efforts to establish peace were also made by participants from Bangladesh, South Africa, India, China and other countries.

At the end of the day, however, what mattered most was not so much what the participants did but what they learned and what they resolved to do.

Asia, as we all know, is a continent deeply divided by conflicts that cut across ethnicity, race, religion, caste, gender and nationality. The conference drove home the point that dealing with Asia's conflicts inevitably entails a holistic analysis and understanding of, first and foremost, the whole notion of violence, particularly its historical, socio-cultural, religious, political and economic roots. Hegemony and identity, particularly on how religion is used to legitimise conflicts by those with vested interests, are key concepts that need to be tackled in order to truly comprehend the complexities of conflicts in the Asian context.

Since injustice, most especially economic injustice, is at the heart of conflicts in Asia—and the whole world—today, the participants espoused that a thorough analysis and understanding of violence must include a thorough analysis and understanding of globalisation as well.

Concomitant points for discussion and scrutiny included the issue of the political economy of gender, the relationship between growing intrareligious and interreligious fundamentalism and political power, the question of empowerment of resistance movements for justice, and the problem of upholding multiple identities in the face of hegemonic forces. Ultimately, however, this analysis of globalisation should evoke a counter-response to the ongoing globalisation from above with a globalisation from below.

Forgiveness and reconciliation were themes that ran through most of the sharing and discussions. These, the participants believed, were key components in laying the ground for conflict transformation. And dia-

logue is a basic component of all of these. In order to engage in dialogue, finding a common ground, according to the participants, is necessary. Here, they put forward the idea of drawing upon Asian values and resources, like the centrality of the community, as a common ground. But then again there is no single formula for peace. Even political agreements have proved to be flawed and riddled with vested interests. As such, time and again, the participants turned to and pointed to religions, especially spirituality and mysticism such as Sufism, as a possible source of solution for conflict transformation.

Religion per se, the participants insisted, is not the source of conflict. It is how it is used, manipulated, and abused to legitimise, reinforce and perpetuate conflicts by those with vested interests that makes it problematic. As such, the participants grappled with questions such as: In what way can religion play a role as connector in the local-global dialogue? Can religious organisations stimulate a dialogue of equals? How can we stop the cooptation of religion in order to truly and fully make it a force for authentic liberation?

What was the response of the participants to these questions? They agreed in the final session to come up with two committees with representatives from AMAN, CCA, and FABC. These two committees will be engaged in two areas that the participants believe are crucial to conflict transformation—dialogue and the training of peace workers.

A desire for justice and a commitment to peace born out of passion for the authentic values of religion—these are the fundamental convictions that came out of this conference that envisioned an Asia that truly witnesses to unity and harmony in the midst of diversity.

—Wati Longchar

Planning, monitoring, evaluation

How does CCA know what difference its work is making?

CCA organised a workshop to find ways to strengthen the planning, monitoring and evaluation (PME) systems in the organisation. The 5–6 February workshop in Hong Kong focused on the importance of PME systems, which could improve the quality of CCA's work and the difference it was making through it.

The workshop also heard Mr Geoff Golledge, Program Planning Coordinator of the PME and Program Management Information System at the London-based Christian Aid, who made an analysis of CCA's PME systems and made recommendations for strengthening them.

Opening the workshop, Dr Ahn Jae Woong, CCA general secretary, said that it was the first time in the history of CCA that a workshop on PME was being organised.

Logical framework analysis, impact assessment, strategic planning, gender analysis and cost effectiveness were some of the topics that were discussed in detail at the workshop.

A key question that came up for discussion was, 'How does CCA know what difference its work is making?'

Geoff Golledge, the main resource person at the workshop, recommended to CCA to clearly define and agree on key PME terms such as activities, outputs, objectives, goals, project, program, indicator and impact 'so that there is a common understanding among the staff, consistency of use and the ability to aggregate information, within and across program areas.'

He recommended that CCA use a logframe approach to develop a standard project proposal format based on common donor requirements. He also wanted CCA to negotiate

with donors for longer-term projects based on clear impact-oriented proposals.

One of the major decisions taken at the workshop was to organise a follow-up on PME for the members of the program area committees towards the end of 2005.

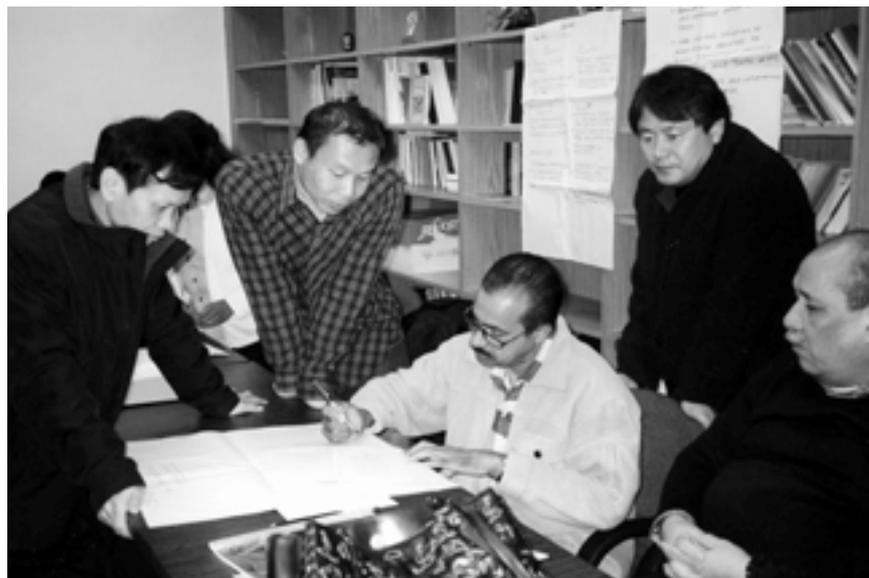
Earlier, on 2–4 February, Geoff had meetings with the executive staff of CCA to discuss how they planned, monitored, evaluated, reported and understood the impact of their programs. He also reviewed CCA documents and publications to understand the work of CCA and its PME systems.

PME systems and practices are considered important for improving the quality and effectiveness of the work of an organisation. It is also meant as a tool for accountability to grassroots work and fundraising

—Philip Mathew



Geoff Golledge



Participants at a group exercise

As we are neighbours

Bangkok meeting calls for a new culture of interfaith cooperation to fight HIV/AIDS

'As we are neighbours' was the theme of an interfaith AIDS conference held 20–25 November 2003 in Bangkok. The conference, organised among others by the Christian Conference of Asia, marked a milestone in the commitment and cooperation of faith-based communities—Buddhists, Muslims, Christians and Hindus—to the issue of HIV/AIDS. One hundred and forty-seven participants from different parts of Asia attended the conference. The other organisers of the AIDS conference were the World Council of Churches, Christian Aid, Norwegian Church Aid, United Evangelical Mission, Church of Christ in Thailand AIDS ministry and Ecumenical Coalition on Tourism. In his opening address Dr Prawate Khid-arn, CCA executive staff member, said that although 2003 marked the 22nd year in the international battle against AIDS, the disease continues to spread across all boundaries, affecting more than 40 million people. He noted that the religious communities have been challenged by their faith and divine teachings against stigmatisation and discrimination and to protect dignity and human rights of all those living with HIV/AIDS. The following statement was issued at the end of the conference.

Religions and faiths are different roads converging to the same goal—service to humanity. In spite of different beliefs, we all have one common platform: A fundamental belief and respect for the unique human value, human dignity and human rights.

HIV is a critical test for our faith and our commitment to building a sustainable community and a fullness of life since HIV is rooted not merely in health and physical sphere but also in lifestyles, social perspectives, attitudes and individual behaviour practices.

As religious communities, we believe that HIV/AIDS is not a form of punishment for the sufferer but an opportunity for us to serve the sufferer. Through this, our religious communities have been challenged by our faith and divine teaching against stigmatisation and discrimination.

We should therefore focus on the teachings common to all religions: love, compassionate service and mercy. The HIV/AIDS crisis is an opportunity to mobilise our concern for the fullness of life for those among us who are infected or affected.

The HIV/AIDS crisis has brought us together. We need to share knowledge, understanding and experience from our various

religious communities so that our efforts become more and more effective. Through this, we unite as a global community to establish a new culture of interfaith cooperation, which will balance the individual interest of our religions with the interest of our societies while focusing on our common values of human dignity and human rights.

It is our common understanding that:

- all humans are equal. We are brothers

and sisters. Thus, we should treat each other with mutual care and respect regardless of social status, faith, gender or lifestyle,

- we should speak openly about the basic facts of the HIV/AIDS crisis and about all effective means of prevention,
- individuals in our communities are facing unprecedented pressure due to globalisation and industrialisation,



Participants at the AIDS conference

- the root causes of the HIV/AIDS crisis include gender inequality, systemic injustice and unequal distribution of wealth. Our approaches therefore have to be sensitive to the various effects our efforts will have for women, men, children, adults, rich and poor,
- young people are especially vulnerable to the HIV/AIDS crisis. We, as religious communities, must therefore provide genuine concern, guidance and support for survival and wellbeing of the future generation,
- we stand united with those who are living with the virus, those who mourn and those who are dying together with their families and communities,
- we pledge to serve and nurture the children of those who have been infected and affected by HIV/AIDS,
- we need to end the silence of stigma, denial and fear about HIV/AIDS and practically embrace those who have become victims of our ignorance and apathy,
- we have to dedicate expanded resources to the fight against the HIV/AIDS crisis,
- medication, treatment and support must be made available for all who need it. It is the responsibility of each and every government, multilateral institutions, the pharmaceutical industry and other international bodies,
- continuous medical research must be



Representatives of different faiths at the conference

given priority. Scientists and research institutes must be encouraged to invent more effective methods of prevention and treatment,

- the HIV/AIDS crisis is the sum of multiple life dimensions: the spirit, the mind and the environment has to be understood in a local, national and global context.

We now call upon all our sisters and brothers to develop a new culture of inter-faith cooperation to fight the global HIV/AIDS crisis and its consequences. HIV/AIDS knows no boundaries and therefore many religious

communities are living with HIV/AIDS. We admit and regret that many religious communities and governments have been slow in reacting to the crisis, with the result that those among us who are living with HIV/AIDS have not always been met with the solidarity and support they deserve.

This must change immediately. It is high time to act now.

At the same time, we call upon all political leaders to spare no efforts in the fight against the HIV/AIDS crisis and its consequences. No political, financial or ideological interests must ever be allowed to overshadow the protection of human value, human dignity and human rights. We also call upon all those who take leadership at the global, national and local levels to fight against the HIV/AIDS crisis and to recognise the role of faith-based communities in this fight and be open to cooperation and dialogue in order to make our common struggle as efficient as possible.

We call upon all advocates in the fight against the HIV/AIDS crisis, including religious communities, political leaders and governments, to actively involve people infected with and affected by HIV/AIDS in all aspects of the fight against the HIV/AIDS crisis. Those who are infected and those who are affected have first-hand knowledge about the situation, and therefore represent an invaluable source of competence that is desperately needed to make the fight succeed.



Catholic Bishop Lawrence Thienchai Samarnchit addressing the AIDS conference

Part of a wider movement

Basic ecumenical course held in Manila

God of wisdom, truth and beauty
God of spirit, fire and soul
God of order, love and duty
God of purpose, plan and goal
Grant us visions ever growing
Breath of life, eternal strength
Mystic spirit, moving, flowing
Filling height and depth and length.

To the tune of 'Joyful, Joyful We Adore Thee', a group of 21 participants, composed of 10 Filipinos, four Indonesians, three Malaysians, three Cambodians and one CCA intern sang out in praise of God at the beginning of the Basic Ecumenical Course (BEC). Organised at the Overlook Resort and Conference Centre, Antipolo City, Metro Manila, Philippines, on 22–29 February, the BEC, run by the National Council of Churches in the Philippines (NCCP) is an expression of the initiative of the Christian Conference of Asia in ecumenical sharing and capacity building and the WCC Asia Desk Ecumenical Enablers Team in Asia program. It is in the spirit of worship that Most Rev. Ignacio Soliba, chairperson of NCCP, warmly greeted the participants.

In an orientation Ms Sharon Rose Joy Ruiz-Duremdes, NCCP general secretary, reiterated that the ecumenical movement is an integral part of the wider movement of workers, peasants, feminists, children's advocates, indigenous, youth and students and others for change. To the extent that the former works for reforms in the church, it contributes to the transformation of society.

Furthermore she emphasised that people who are committed to change bring about social changes. But a high level of preparedness, which includes certain knowledge, attitudes and skills, must accompany commitment. Therefore, training is imperative to

all those who work within the church. Thus the BEC aims to:

- equip second- and third-generation leaders with a basic grasp of contemporary and emerging ecumenical issues,
- deepen the theoretical and theological resources of potential ecumenical leaders,
- enhance the participants' skills in discerning the relationship between theology and social reality.

Through carefully crafted steps in the course, the participants went through the following:

Sharing of ecumenical journey

Facilitated by Liza Lamis, women's desk coordinator, each participant reflected on events, feelings, people, challenges and discouragement in their ecumenical journey. Then each had to answer, 'What does ecumenism mean to me now?' The answers were presented on big brown paper through imagery, key words and timelines as visual aids during the sharing. Nina of SCM Indonesia stated that, for her, ecumenism is a dynamic process of responding to issues in our society, not only with Christians but also with Buddhists, Hin-

dus and people of other cultures and faiths. Emerald, from the United Church of Christ in the Philippines in Mindanao, shared that in her experience as a youth coordinator of the MOKABULA Regional Ecumenical Formation, the challenge is to breed new leaders in the ecumenical movement. 'Tap youth skills and talents for the ecumenical movement in being part of a wider movement in order to make shalom closer to reality,' she said. Learning starts with yourself, and the process was a rich discovery of what the participants brought with them. All of these experiences synthesised as 'working with people in the journey with God'.

Immersion/integration

The group was divided into three for integration with the fisherfolks, factory workers and urban poor—to live with them, to feel with them, to be with them—even if just for a 24-hour immersion. Well oriented by Lesley Capuz, NCCP Youth Coordinator, the participants came back to the venue the following morning tired but enriched with insights from being with the struggling poor. They had small-group reflection and creative presentation of their description of the



Participants on the course during a time of worship

community, insights learned, feelings and the challenge to the church. They were inspired that organised poor communities are united in airing their opposition to unjust laws and policies, which affect their already difficult lives. People suffer in poverty, nevertheless, their spirit aspiring for a better life remains. Cutting across all these groups are a few reflections on women's issues of discrimination against women in factories, lack of control over one's body and one's reproductive rights, silenced voices even among those women who were in the picket line.

International and regional situation

Using a PowerPoint presentation, Rev. Rex Reyes, program secretary for the Commission on Unity and Ecumenical Relations, walked through the context of a 'globalised' and 'terrorised' world. He then discussed the current troubles of US hegemony and presence in Asia and the resurgence of religious fundamentalism.

In his concluding remarks juxtaposing globalisation and ecumenism he said, 'Where globalisation speaks of human happiness in terms of personal bank accounts, malls, private ownership and material things, ecumenism speaks of community and of being in community. Where globalisation is directed at the worship of mammon, ecumenism is directed at the true worship of God. Where globalisation spells death and destruction, ecumenism spells life.'

Biblico-theological foundations of ecumenism and the ecumenical agenda

This was led by Rev. Norman Reuel Marigza, who engaged the participants in a creative group reflection on ecumenism. He gave input on the ecumenical agenda since the founding of World Council of Churches and engaged the participants in small groups in identifying the biblical texts that provide the basis on why churches/the ecumenical movement should address the issues of Christian unity, development, human rights, justice, peace and integrity of creation, gender justice, peace issues and overcoming violence, and globalisation. Finally, he affirmed that collective learning was more interesting!



An act of worship

Orientation on organised expressions of the ecumenical movement

Corazon Tabing-Reyes introduced the brief history, purpose, structure and program of the World Council of Churches and the Christian Conference of Asia. The country delegations introduced their respective councils: the Kampuchea Christian Council, the Council of Churches in Malaysia, the Communion of Churches in Indonesia and the National Council of Churches in the Philippines. The search for a common witness and service in obedience to the prayer of Jesus Christ continues and the BEC participants heard the call for them to be ecumenical agents.

Ecumenical leadership

Sharon facilitated a group dynamics session to reflect on the learning tasks of leadership after which there was a panel of speakers who shared from their own experiences on ecumenical leadership from the feminist movement, from the student movement and from the social movement. Along with Sharon, Mr Bayani Alonzo III, chairperson of SCM Philippines and Fr Jose Sison shared practical tips on ecumenical leadership that was participatory and engaging rather than top-down and dominating, reflection and action-oriented, identifying with the poor and marginalised sectors of society modelling after Jesus Christ.

Back-home application, fears and hopes and evaluation

The BEC journey goes back to each person

to plan for what each one can do when they get back to their community in order to serve as an ecumenical agent. It will not be easy, each has fears but there is always hope that the ecumenical agent is not doing it alone but with God! And a network of ecumenical friends with the common ecumenical goal for change is fostered. 'Being part of a wider movement in order to make shalom closer to reality' reverberates.

Generally, the participants affirmed the efficient organisation of the whole course, the gifts of the facilitators and resource persons and the content and process-oriented methodology, which actively engaged them holistically. They not only enhanced their knowledge and skills but also experienced living together as an ecumenical community, where acceptance, respect, tolerance, trust, culture and gender sensitivity were values learned and affirmed. Despite the limitation in speaking English, the BEC proved that language is not only through words or body language. It is also through the heart.

As Jesus said, 'I do not call you servants any longer, because the servant does not know what the master is doing; but I have called you friends, because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from my Father. You did not choose me but I chose you. And I appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last, so that the Father will give you whatever you ask him in my name. I am giving you these commands so that you may love one another.' (John 15:15-17 NRSV)

—Corazon Tabing-Reyes

To be a peacemaker

Northeast Asia Peace Consultation held in Seoul

To Be a Peacemaker: Overcoming Violence' was theme of the Northeast Asia Peace Consultation organised in Seoul on 23–29 November 2003. Thirty-five youth leaders and church leaders, academics and activists from Korea, Japan, Taiwan and Hong Kong attended the consultation, which was organised by the Christian Conference of Asia in partnership with the Presbyterian Church in Taiwan, the National Council of Churches in Japan and the Hong Kong Christian Council. It facilitated sharing and exploration on issues of conflict transformation and peace initiatives in the context of northeast Asia and helped build a network of peace activists among the youth in the region.

The main objectives of the consultation were:

- to bring together youth from the northeast Asian countries for deliberation and exploration of peace and conflict issues, issues of globalisation and economic neocolonisation in the subregion,
- to provide a platform for formation of a peace network in northeast Asia,
- to provide an opportunity for interlinking with other regions in Asia.

The program included Bible studies, theological reflections on peace building, inputs on realities of northeast Asia with a specific focus on militarism in the area, and workshops on initiating and building a peace network in northeast Asia. The topics discussed were:

- militarism in northeast Asia,
- people's security,
- theological perspectives on peace building and related contemporary issues,
- economic dominance and globalisation,
- developing a network for peace in northeast Asia.

The national delegations suggested and decided on specific action plans to be car-



Participants at a session of reflection

ried out over the next two years to address these issues.

The following subregional issues relevant to northeast Asia were identified:

- *A multiracial, multicultural society*—After sharing the background of multiracial problems in each country, the group found that the most common problem is that foreigners are not treated fairly in social welfare and that they are looked down upon by the local residents. They affirmed the need to address the safety and rights of foreign workers in

northeast Asia. As a concrete step, the participants decided to set up a web page to provide information on relevant issues as resources for them.

- *Peaceful relations across the Taiwan Strait*—The group recognised the need to promote solidarity and understanding for security and stability across the Taiwan Strait. The participants decided to share information and facilitate an education program for the peaceful and healthy coexistence of all east Asian countries and their peoples. →



At a group discussion

Importance of youth training

CCA-UNESCOAP consultation works towards an enhanced youth policy

A consultation on youth policy implementation issues organised by the Christian Conference of Asia and the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCOAP) on 18 and 19 December 2003 in Bangkok, Thailand, provided a venue for project proponents, partners and implementers to share experiences, outcomes and lessons learned and to make recommendations on the ongoing joint CCA-UNESCOAP project, 'Strengthening National HRD Capabilities in Poverty Alleviation and Conflict Negotiation Skills for Youth'.

Twenty participants, including CCA and UNESCOAP staff as well as representatives from national counterpart organisations in Cambodia, Myanmar, Sri Lanka and the Philippines attended the consultation.

The main focus was on the exchange of lessons and insights in order to deepen the gains made under the current project. Ms Thelma Kay, chief of the Emerging Social Issues Division of UNESCOAP, who opened the consultation, highlighted the importance of continuous youth capacity building through conflict negotiation skills training.

Rev. Dr Lee Hong Jung, an executive secretary of CCA, urged the participants to consider the religious-cultural dimension as well as ethnic group diversity as vital to the project goal of building youth capabilities in poverty alleviation and conflict negotiation,

particularly in the Asia-Pacific region. He emphasised the importance of a pluralistic approach in achieving the specific goals and objectives shared by all participants.

In recognition of the ability of young people to influence others, including their peers, their parents and even decision-making bodies, the consultation pushed for the holistic empowerment of young people through training, with particular attention to indigenous cultural resources, the ecological dimension and the interconnectedness of individuals, groups and communities. Participants decided to organise regional workshops for youth participating in national conflict-negotiation skills training, in order to intensify their advocacy level.

Participants also agreed that in order to widen the reach of the program, future partnerships should target not only youth organisations and youth workers but also, more importantly, young people at the grass-roots level who directly experience economic deprivation.

Systematic monitoring and evaluation as well as measurement of progress and timely course correction were also deemed necessary, else insufficiencies and weaknesses would remain undetected.

Participants called for more cooperation with both government agencies and non-governmental organisations. There was a desire for a more integrated action plan that would

not isolate individual government ministries and their efforts. The consultation advocated the promotion of multi-ministerial dialogue and cooperation, including the sharing of resources. The importance of social mobilisation to build strategic alliances with health service providers, schools, community stakeholders and local NGOs for resource mobilisation was underscored.

Representatives from counterpart organisations in four participating countries: the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports (Cambodia), the Department of Social Welfare (Myanmar), the Department of Social Welfare and Development (Philippines), the Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports, and the Ministry of Human Resources Development, Education and Cultural Affairs (Sri Lanka) identified several key issues that require further attention, such as school health education, the prevention of HIV/AIDS and sexually transmitted infections, parent effectiveness, and gender and development.

The consultation was part of the concluding activities for the project's third and final year and helped to pave the way for the next CCA-UNESCOAP joint project for 2004–2006, tentatively titled 'Strengthening Youth Life-skills Capabilities towards Peace and Sustainable Development'.

Ms Carmencita Karagdag, consultant for the CCA-UNESCOAP joint project, helped organise the consultation.

- *Military bases in northeast Asian countries: 'We need friendships, not wars'*—The group reaffirmed their right, and the right of their nations, to make their own decision without depending on the hegemony of powerful nations. The participants resolved to make themselves more aware about issues related to militarism in each other's countries, and support each country's action against war-

ships with their physical presence, where possible, as well as with their prayers.

- *Reunification in Korean Peninsula*—The participants took cognisance and recognised the division of the Korean Peninsula, a division that is keeping families and peoples apart. They committed their support to the unification efforts on the Korean Peninsula.

An important aspect of the consultation

was the two-day workshop on action planning for peace initiatives, nationally and subregionally. The workshops helped the participants to focus their concerns on one or two national issues and two to three sub-regional issues. The national delegations prioritised one issue and developed concrete action plans to be followed by the respective youth departments of national councils of churches.

—Rakesh Peter Dass

Churches urged to promote ecumenical student ministry

CCA-WSCF Asia-Pacific joint consultation

A regional consultation on 'Ecumenical Student Ministry in the Asia Pacific Region—Its Challenges and Mission', held in Hong Kong noted that the current education system is 'elitist, commercialised, repressive and colonial'. This, the consultation claimed, has resulted in alienating students from serious social problems and issues and from movements working for radical changes in the society.

The consultation was organised by CCA and the World Student Christian Federation Asia-Pacific Region (WSCF) as part of an ongoing ministry of the churches and Student Christian Movements (SCM). According to Rev. Shin Seung Min, regional secretary of

WSCF, one of the aims of the consultation was to critically analyse the role of universities and students in the wider context of church and society.

The 3–4 December consultation, which gathered some 20 participants from different parts of Asia and the Pacific, called for 'a dismantling-supplanting ministry to consistently critique the current education system and to propose student-centred alternatives'.

Delivering the opening address at the joint consultation, Dr Ahn Jae Woong, General Secretary of CCA, said that ecumenical student and youth movements should take the lead in evolving new value systems and new working styles for the young people of

the world. He stressed the need for building youth and student movements on the basis of faith, justice, ecojustice, gender justice and fuller human development for the creation of a new society. 'These movements should also link with each other and larger people's movements to bring about radical social transformation in the society,' he added. He also highlighted the importance of ecumenical cooperation on leadership formation, ecumenical partnership with internal and external groups and forces, ecumenical empowerment for God's ministry among students and youth and ecumenical commitment for God's calling in our life situation in Asia.

Ahn Jae Woong noted that CCA-WSCF joint programs were good examples of successful ecumenical cooperation between churches and student Christian movements at national and regional levels in Asia. According to him, there are wonderful ecumenical partnerships between CCA and the WSCF-AP region, manifested in earlier programs such as the CCA-WSCF joint consultations in 1982, 1985 and 1995, the Asia Youth Assembly in 1984 and NCC and SCM consultations at national levels.

In a statement, the consultation urged the churches to promote ecumenical student and youth ministry to develop potential leaders. The participants, representing CCA and the WSCF, committed them-



Participants at the CCA-WSCF consultation



A session in progress

selves to 'actively involve in the challenges that are faced by the student ministry and to provide it with the guiding tools to help develop the vitality in the mission of ecumenical student ministry'. They said that there was a need for continuous and constructive dialogue between the church and the SCMs at all levels

The consultation began with a worship led by Corazon Tabing-Reyes, CCA executive staff member. Sharon Rose Joy Ruiz Duremdez, General Secretary of the National Council of Churches in the Philippines, delivered the keynote address. The consultation also heard presentations by ecumenical leader Rev. David Gill on the importance of student ministry in the local church, human rights activist Wong Kai Shing on SCM's role in society and academic Dr Betty Abregana on SCM's relations with the faculties and chaplains in higher education.

Delivering the keynote address, Sharon Rose pointed out that ecumenical student ministry should be a cradle for nurturing relationships, because ecumenism is basically about relationships. 'The whole inhabited earth is always seen as an arena of relationships,' she noted. According to her, an ecumenical ministry is an integral part of the struggle for the liberation of the oppressed. To be involved in this ministry is to give meaning to the struggle for humanisation,

overcoming of alienation and the affirmation of women and men as persons.

Group discussions were held on the presentations made at the consultation to enable deeper sharing among the participants. The groups also reflected on the past eight years of CCA-WSCF joint programs. Following the discussions the consultation recommended:

- tripartite talks and discussions between the Asian Christian Faculty Fellowship, SCM and the NCC,

- networking with chaplains and faculty,
- CCA could set up a neutral ground for good communication for addressing issues,
- *CCA News* to cover WSCF activities as part of promoting SCMs in the churches,
- CCA could help with resource sharing, especially in terms of initiating dialogues among churches, WSCF and SCMs
- Asian Conference of Theology Students to address the ecumenical student ministry, and the possibility of including student ministry in the theological curriculum,
- defining the relationship and partnership of SCM and national councils and study what structures will be appropriate for each country. Some countries have SCMs as national council associated members or SCMs as the main arm of the council in its student ministry.

The closing worship was led by Rev. Stephen Hsu, WSCF-AP chairperson.

The WSCF is a global community of SCMs committed to dialogue, ecumenism, social justice and peace. It empowers students in critical thinking and constructive transformation of the world by providing space for prayer and celebration, theological reflection, study and analysis of social and cultural processes and solidarity, and action across boundaries of culture and ethnicity.

—Wong Yock Leng and Philip Mathew



A section of the participants

The plight of street children

Consultation urges church to restore dignity and fullness of life to all children

Despite an intensification of globalisation, the number of children living on the streets has steeply increased, participants were told at a interregional consultation organised by the World Council of Churches (WCC) and the Christian Conference of Asia (CCA). The consultation, on 'Fullness of life and dignity of children: focus on street children', took place at Virar, near Bombay, India, on 21–25 January

Participants—church leaders from Africa, Asia, the Caribbean, Europe, Latin America and the Middle East—said the plight of street children calls churches to engage even more actively with and for such vulnerable children, and gave several examples of churches working to protect children's dignity and their right to a decent life.

'Despite tremendous growth in economic activity and the globalisation of trade and capital, despite the penetration of transnational corporations into every corner of the world and an increase of productivity, the world's poor have not benefited, and the children of the poor suffer the negative impact of this much-popularised development growth,' the church leaders observed.

They testified that millions of children living and working on the streets come to hate the society that has rejected them. But they also gave examples of churches playing a vital role in responding to the cry of 'a generation lost in the wilderness', reuniting street children with their families and reintegrating them into society. They also emphasised that churches need to move away from a traditional charity-based approach as the magnitude of the problems faced by children intensifies.

Fr Gabriel Cazacu of the Romanian Orthodox Church, who works among street children in Romania, said market-oriented economic reforms there have created large

numbers of street children, more and more of whom are addicted to drugs such as poisonous glue. The Orthodox Church has been providing care and protection to hundreds of street children. 'The love and affection they have received has helped them to blossom,' Fr Cazacu added.

'A generation lost in the wilderness'

Emmanuel Motsamal, who coordinates a National Council of Churches in Botswana program on children, said, 'African children's lives are becoming much more vulnerable due to rising intrastate conflict and loosely organised fighting groups, and to HIV/AIDS.' Caribbean Council of Churches president Oluwakemi Linda Banks reported that 'the changing pattern in social and family lives and moral values, and the increasing breakdown of the family have affected the upbringing of children in many parts of the Caribbean'.

Joan Arelis Figueroa, of the Disciples of Christ, Puerto Rico, also reported that the number of child workers and street children in Latin America has increased. Begging and juvenile delinquency are common in most Latin American countries, and increasing violence among these children is the result of promiscuity, growing poverty and hunger, she said.

WCC program executive for Latin America and Caribbean Marta Palma provided additional statistics on how children are being mistreated and exploited in Latin American countries, but said that several rehabilitation and counselling centres for children have been initiated by Latin American churches.

Chuleepran Srisuntorn-Persons of the Church of Christ in Thailand (CCT), and CCA executive secretary Josef Widyatmaja

observed that sexual exploitation of children, including prostitution, pornography and trafficking, has become a serious problem in Asia ever since economic liberalisation was launched by Asian governments. Several Asian countries have been experiencing a wave of sex tourism, which destroys the dignity of thousands of Asian children every year. The CCT has opened up new avenues to asylum and foster care for many abandoned children and those whose parents are affected by HIV/AIDS, Chuleepran reported.

Clarissa Chang of the Council of Churches in Malaysia said some churches in her country have motivated congregation members to foster children who need care and protection. The program director the Church of North India ministry to children, Sanjana Das, described the dedication of several local congregations to fulfilling the basic needs of vulnerable children through custodial care.

In a keynote address at the start of the consultation, WCC program executive for Asia, Mathews George Chunakara, pointed out that 'despite all the international instruments existing now to protect and promote the rights of the child, especially the Convention on the Rights of the Child of 1989, which has been ratified by 191 countries, more than 250 million children around the world are on the streets, and most of them are in Asia and Latin America'.

Inaugurating the consultation, CCA president Metropolitan Dr Joseph Mar Iranaeus of the Mar Thoma Syrian Church in India said that 'As we are surrounded by millions of children who have lost dignity and fullness of life in their day-to-day lives, churches around the world should respond to God's call to be the partners in His mission to restore the dignity and fullness of life of all children.' These are God's gifts, and 'children deserve them as much as any other human beings'.

—WCC

A community of peace for all

People's forum aims to build another world

About 100,000 people from different parts of the world gathered in Mumbai, India, on 16–21 January 2004 to participate in the fourth World Social Forum (WSF). The forum began in 2001 in Porte Allegre, Brazil, and has become a world movement, challenging the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland.

WSF aims to establish a dialogue with all the movements that resist globalisation and American domination in the world. It focused on the American occupation of Iraq and searched for justice in all areas—economic, political and cultural.

The theme of WSF was 'Another World Is Possible', reflecting the dream of millions of people in the world who suffer from the impact of globalisation. As one of the street children from New Delhi pointed out, 'I pass my life with hunger and cold weather. My parents could not give me enough food and education. I must spend all my time in the street to earn money. The world seems like hell. I have a dream that one day I could become a social worker for my fellow street children. I have a dream that one day the world could be changed into heaven.' This dream is not only the dream of one street child but also that of millions of people who suffer from the impact of globalisation.

During the WSF, and in cooperation with National Council of Churches of India, the Christian Conference of Asia Faith Mission and Unity program area organised a people's forum in Mumbai on 16–20 January 2004. About 50 participants from Asia and representatives from the Middle East and Africa attended the meeting. Among them were 20 women. The theme of forum was 'Building Community of Peace for All'. This theme is not only the dream of churches and URM in Asia, but also the dream of many people from different faiths and walks of

life, such as farmers, workers, street children, women, youth, Dalit and indigenous people. People of different faiths shared their aspirations for peace from their faith backgrounds: Mohinder Singh (Sikh), Ipe Joseph (Christian), Sulak Sivaraksa (Buddhist), M.A. Siraj (Muslim), U Kyawtan (from ecumenical experience), Ninan Koshy (from a political perspective) and Xiao Lian (China, from an economic perspective). All speakers acknowledged and stressed that the call of religion is peace for all, but religions have been misused by few fundamentalists who have created an attitude of intolerance to others. Religion as an institution had failed to bring peace with justice in the globalised world.

Josef P. Widyatmadja, the executive secretary of CCA-FMU, presented a paper on 'Religion for Peace and Life in the Globalised World'. He focused on the need for people to dream another world together. Dream is

positive. Soekarno in Indonesia had a dream 'to build the world a new', Nasser from Egypt had a dream for 'Pan Arab' nationalism, Malcolm X and Martin Luther King had dreams for the rights of the black people in American society and Nelson Mandela had dreamt for the abolition of apartheid in South Africa. For many years Asia and Africa searched for liberative religion and another world. Religion should not be divided because of people's differences of tradition, history, expressing their faith, and ways of propagating their religion. Instead religions should work together to bring justice and peace for all. The People's Forum ended with a declaration that called on people of different faiths to build another world. It called for Asian-African solidarity in facing globalisation. Countries that participated in the Asia-Africa Conference in 1955 were encouraged to celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of the conference in April next year. —*Joseph P. Widyatmadja*



Demonstrating at the fourth World Social Forum

Agenda for life

Women weaving creative power

The Ecumenical Women's Forum held in the Philippines, comprising women of various faiths—Christians and Muslims, from different backgrounds—church and social workers, housewives and labourers, has declared its opposition to all manifestations of violence: economic violence, state and electoral violence, gender-based and domestic violence, and ecological violence. In a declaration issued on 6 March the forum said, 'For it is women, children and other marginalised people who bear the brunt of violence. Today we stand together as women celebrating, through prayer and action, International Women's Day 2004, in unity with our sisters around the world in a turbulent period of elections in the Philippines.'

'On this day, we pay tribute to generations of heroic women before us, particularly the women in the United States who, for the very first time, marched in the streets of New York City on 8 March 1857 demanding the right to suffrage and just working conditions. We will not squander this hard-won right.

'On this day, too, we honour our own women politicians, activists and martyrs who have been victims of militarisation and election-related violence in Mindoro and in other militarised regions. We will commemorate their lives by continuing to promote the values for which they died.

'This election season we are challenged like never before to creatively and actively participate in the politics of transformation, as a critical and engaged electorate and also as committed candidates, in order to preserve and sustain the forces of life. For a long time our country has been beset by political and economic crises that have left the majority of our people, especially women and children, in abject poverty and with scant hope for the future. Now, more than ever, our country cries for a fundamental transformation of its political and economic structures.

While elections have often been a contest between the elite and characterized by opportunism, elections could potentially be a tool for empowerment. More importantly, we, as women, are conscious of our collective power as agents of change.

'Towards this end, we aim to promote and advance a women's electoral agenda that is also, at core, an agenda in affirmation of life. We believe that the Agenda for Life has the following defining cornerstones fundamental to all faiths: justice, peace and the integrity of creation.

'Under the Agenda for Life, we demand genuine socioeconomic justice and the protection of social, economic and cultural rights of all Filipinos. We demand dignified employment, fair wages and job security for women and men, as opposed to exploitative working conditions, subsistence wages and labour contractualisation favoured by the globalisation project, which has sparked "a race to the bottom", the provision of quality and affordable education, health care, housing, water and other life-sustaining social services instead of corporate control over these basic needs, just international trade and cancellation of foreign debts incurred illegitimately, and genuine redistribution of land. Not least, we demand equal opportunities for women towards a transformed society where women's productive and reproductive work are valued and recognised.

'We demand sustainable peace, an end to the US military presence in our sovereign islands and to rampant militarisation disguised as a "war against terror", the prioritisation of basic social services and concomitant shrinking of defence-related expenditures in the national budget, respect for human rights including the prosecution of human-rights violators and freedom for all political detainees, and the conduct of principled peace negotiations between the government, NDF and MILF to end decades of armed conflict. On

20 March 2004, the Global Day of Action for Peace, we will join our voices with millions around the world who still say "no!" to war and "yes!" to peace with justice. To women, peace also means the elimination of all forms of violence against women. We therefore demand the enforcement of effective laws to stop violence against women.

'Finally, we demand the protection and nurture of all creation and the physical environment to ensure ecological balance and intergenerational equity. We particularly demand that the US government clean and pay the environmental and social costs of toxic substances dumped in the former US bases that have wrought havoc on our communities' health and well being. We are women envisioning a society where justice and peace reign, where the integrity of creation is upheld, and where women and men live in responsibility and equality. We are women collectively weaving our creative power for life in all its abundance!'

'Be strong and courageous; do not be terrified; do not be discouraged for the Lord your God will be with you.' (Joshua 1:9)

—Carmencita Karagdag and Sr Xavier Marie Bual (Coconveners)

The EWF consists of the Women Gender Commission—Association of Major Religious Superiors of the Philippines, Women's Desk—National Council of Churches in the Philippines, National Christian Women's Association, United Church of Christ in the Philippines, Women of the Philippine Independent Church, Episcopal Church Women, Board of Women's Work, United Methodist Church, KASIMBAYAN, Women's Collective, Diakonia Phils, Association of Women in Theology, BATIS Centre for Women, Federation of Convention Baptist Women's Missionary Unions, Inc., Asuncion Perez Memorial Centre, Moro Christian People's Alliance and Sisters of the Good Shepherd-WJPC Committee.

Put the margin at the centre

Younger theologians claim their ecumenical space

In a consultation held on 23–28 February on interrogating and redefining power, younger theologians from the South affirmed the need for an ecumenical space, which they named AAPACALA for Afro-Asia-Pacific-Caribbean-Latin America, for envisioning new things and new ways in the ecumenical movement. AAPACALA has the sound of *apakala*, the Indonesian word for ‘What time is it?’, which signifies a kairotic moment in the ecumenical movement.

The younger theologians defined this ecumenical space as more than the geographical connotations of South and North. Whereas North stands for being aligned with the Empire (i.e. the dominant power in the world today), South represents the voices of struggle, resistance and solidarity for life. However, they recognise that even in the North are voices questioning the Empire and some initiatives at building solidarity with the South.

For the younger theologians, what binds the countries in the South are experiences of being marginalised, the presence of power structures of domination, failures of traditional theologies in addressing contextual issues, lack of space for expression of differences, but more positively, sharing a common vision of justice for all.

Looking at how the Bible and Christianity have unfortunately been used as ideological tools of dominance in many countries of the South, the younger theologians called for relocating sites of power, by making the central peripheral and putting the margin at the centre.

The group called for guarding against the tendency to absolutise and universalise Christian truth, recognising the truth in other religions and philosophies. They also called for a critical appraisal of the scriptures, deconstructing the oppressive and lifting up the liberating. In simple attempts to portray Jesus as a Southerner, the group affirmed,

‘We visualise Jesus as a symbol of resistance to oppressive power, subverter of situations and ways of seeing and living, and a symbol against the misuse of the prosperity gospel.’ They therefore called for revisiting various biblical and theological concepts. One such concept is servanthood, which to them is a call to radical discipleship, especially to those in power or who aspire to be in power. It is also a call to mutual servanthood in the context of a willingness (not being forced) to serve, which can truly come about after being empowered and set free from all dominating and hierarchical structures of power.

They proposed that the process of inter-religious engagement and dialogue be made the key ecumenical agenda to interrogate and overcome structures and dynamics of dominant power. This calls for interfaith religious education at all levels of theological, public and civic education.

Jointly organised by CCA-FMU and the WCC Faith and Order Team, this consultation brought together 29 younger theologians, ethicists and activists teaching in seminaries and universities or working with NGOs dealing with women’s issues, HIV/AIDS, children with autism, queer activism, labour issues and so on. Participants came as resource persons in their own right, presenting papers on particular dimensions of power, including its use and abuse.

Ms Carolyn Anonuevo, a Filipina senior researcher of the UNESCO Institute of Education, based in Germany, facilitated a feminist sociological approach to ‘unpacking power’. She described power as FIRE Power—at some point it is feared, ignored, revered or enlightened. For the most part it is DEAF power—dominating, exploiting, authority-exerting and fear-instilling. She challenged the group to work for transformed practices of power: practising power to (meaning one becoming an agency), overcoming tendencies of power over, working towards more

power within, engaging in more practices of power and redefining our bases of power (e.g. physical strength and weapons, control of natural and financial resources, position/influence and connections, knowledge and expertise, and gender).

Dr Kim Yong Bock, chancellor of the Advanced Institute of the Study of Life in Korea, challenged the group by saying that the future of Christianity lies in the South. Expressing his hopes in younger theologians to come up with new ecumenical vision, he said, there is a need to expose the symbiosis of Christianity and empire. ‘When Christianity became part of the Empire, it lost its subversive character,’ he said. Among the challenges for younger theologians is to begin an interfaith process rather than dialogue and not to recover the traditional concept and practice of mission and conversion but to make a shift towards an invitation of one another to the feast of life.

The group asked that ecumenical organisations continue the process of providing an ecumenical space for younger theologians to discuss South to South issues and deal with geopolitical realities affecting their regions. For themselves, they suggested designing courses and sharing with one another, holding small group workshops.

Another recommendation was for the ecumenical space for younger theologians to be open to a new group each time. By doing so the mistake of older theologians in perpetually attending ecumenical meetings and creating a clique among themselves will be avoided and more of the younger people will be developed in the ecumenical movement.

The consultation was hosted by the Church of Christ in Thailand and Payap McGilvary Faculty of Theology, led by Dr Chuleepran Srisuntorn-Persons, a member of the CCA executive committee.

—Hope S. Antone

Significant change

United Board program operations to move to Asia

Acting on the recommendations of a task force chaired by Dr Willi Toisuta, president emeritus of Satya Wacana Christian University in Indonesia, the trustees of the United Board for Christian Higher Education in Asia voted at their November 2003 meeting to move the United Board's program personnel and program office to Asia. This is a significant change in the way the United Board operates and promises to transform its work, ensuring that it will remain relevant, timely and evidence based.

Grounded in its ongoing mission to support a Christian presence in Asia's institutions of higher education, the United Board will intensify its focus on programs. It will support initiatives and opportunities as they emerge from the knowledge and on-site expertise that this move facilitates. In addition, the move will enable more immediate and collaborative dialogue between United Board program officers and their Asian scholars-partners.

As a result of this ground-breaking decision, the Asian Christian Higher Education Institute, established in 2001 and currently located on the campus of Hong Kong Baptist University, will now be the main focus of all United Board program activity in Asia. While the institute's office could remain in Hong Kong, the United Board is currently researching other possible sites in Asia, with a decision on any relocation to be made by June 2004.

In this new endeavour, four program officers will both manage specific geographic areas and oversee particular interinstitutional/interregional program initiatives. After a period of transition, all program officers will be based together in the institute's offices in Asia, where it is envisioned that they will be able to more effectively interact and share knowledge and skills with one another

and other experts throughout Asia. The institute's staff will henceforward be revised to include an executive director/vice president for programs and three associate directors. Each member of the program staff comes to their new positions with a wealth of skill and experience of Asia and the United Board. While the geographic areas of responsibility have been decided, the distribution of program area oversight for each program officer will be determined at a later date. At present, these program areas include faculty and leadership development, Asian theologies, networking and joint programs, and other areas such as women's programs and service-learning initiatives.

Dr David Kwang-Sun Suh, the founding executive director of the institute, retains that title and now serves as well as the United Board's vice president for programs. Dr Suh will oversee all program operations of the United Board/Institute and will manage specific program activity in Japan, Korea and Taiwan.

Dr Rita Pullium, vice president of the United Board, will also be one of the institute's three associate directors and will manage programs in Cambodia, East Timor, Indonesia, the Philippines, Thailand and Vietnam. Dr Pullium will continue to coordinate the United Board Fellows Program, through which promising young administrators spend a semester in each of two years at schools in Asia and the West in a leadership mentoring program. As managing that program involves intensive coordination with both USA and Asian institutions, Dr Pullium will not move permanently to Asia. She will continue to be based in New York and will serve as an essential liaison between the offices in Asia and the USA.

Dr Betty Abregana will continue serving as an associate director of the institute and will now take on the management of the

United Board's programs in India and Myanmar. Ms Anne Ofstedal, the third associate director of the institute, will continue her expert management of the United Board's programs in China, including Hong Kong. Under her leadership, the China program's focus is changing to link the mature universities of China with less developed institutions in the interior provinces of China.

The overall management and oversight of the United Board, including the Asian Institute, continue to be among the responsibilities of the president of the United Board, Dr Richard J. Wood. Dr Wood will continue to be based in the New York office. In addition to his regular travel to Asia, he will henceforth be more intensively engaged in major gifts fundraising, specifically focusing on a new initiative of the United Board to build new endowment funding for Asian theologies. Also continuing to staff the New York office are Ann-Marie Condon, executive assistant to the president, Candy Eng, vice president for finance and administration, Nan Hawkins, director of alumni giving and communications, and Joseph Sprunger, director of foundation relations. A new staff member, Ely Santoni, will serve as major gifts officer from the New York office.

Among the United Board's greatest assets is its access to a powerful network of Asian universities and colleges and their knowledgeable and informed faculty and administrators. With this change in location to Asia, it is expected that program evaluation and assessment, as well as proposals for program development, will be initiated with the deliberate collaboration and expert assistance of those institutions. This move will enable the United Board to establish a stronger and more relevant knowledge base, thus enhancing its ability to contribute to the rapidly evolving and increasingly sophisticated matrix of higher education in Asia.

Inspiration for thousands

109th Maramon Convention

The 109th Maramon Convention was held 15–22 February 2004 on the sandbed of river Pamba at Maramon, in the southern Indian state of Kerala. The Maramon Convention, considered to be the largest ecumenical gathering of Christians in Asia, is organised every year by the Mar Thoma Evangelistic Association, the missionary wing of the Mar Thoma Church.

The convention is held every year in a huge tent, which can accommodate some 100,000 people. Around the tent are temporary stalls selling books and literature, offices of various church departments and related organisations and restaurants, which are run under the supervision of the church authorities.

The 2004 convention was attended by thousands of people from different parts of the country and from overseas. All the bishops of the church, including Bishop Joseph

Mar Irenaeus, the Suffragan Metropolitan, who is also a member of the CCA presidium, were present at the convention.

Speaking at the convention, Metropolitan Philipose Mar Chrysostum, head of the Mar Thoma Church, stressed the need for compassion and concern for fellow human beings in day-to-day life. He announced that the Mar Thoma Church will observe 2004 as the Year of Love and Compassion.

The week-long convention underlined the need for seeing the image of God in every human being and to make homes the centres of salvation. Metropolitan Mar Chrysostum wanted the Maramon Convention to become instrumental in restoring justice to society and humanity to people. He told how Christ had spotted Zacchaeus sitting in a tree, called him by his name and accompanied him home. We too need to recognise people like Zacchaeus in our society, recognise God in them and lead them to the joy of salvation.

Like Zacchaeus, many believe that amassing wealth is the ultimate aim of life. The truth is that there can be no real happiness unless and until poverty is eradicated from our society, the Metropolitan said.

Among the other speakers at the convention were Bishop John W. Gladwein (UK), Rev. Cleophus J. Larue (USA) and Rev. Valsan Thanmbu (India).

Some of the speakers who have addressed earlier conventions were Anglican Missionary Rev. T. Walker, American Missionary Dr Stanley Jones and the well-known Japanese preacher, Dr Kagawa.

Bible study, prayer and worship are important parts of the Maramon Convention. One of the highlights is the ecumenical meeting organised during the convention.

The Maramon Convention not only fosters an ecumenical outlook but also provides inspiration and enlightenment to thousands who attend it.

—Philip Mathew



The venue of the Maramon convention on the banks of the river Pamba

Human rights in Asia

Carmencita Karagdag reviews the pathetic human-rights situation in the region

Two of the largest countries of the world, with the biggest populations, China and India, are in Asia. The region is home to major ancient religions predating Christianity and some of the greatest and most ancient civilisations known to humankind. Its cultural, religious, political and economic diversity is matched only by an unparalleled racial, communal and ethnic plurality. It is this history and context of extraordinary diversity and plurality in the region and within countries in the region that provides much of the backdrop to the Asian reality of long-entrenched authoritarian regimes, military dictatorships, repressive measures, draconian national security laws, violence against women and brutal disregard for human life.

Much, for instance, has been said about alleged cultural resistance to human rights in Asia, i.e. that so-called traditional Asian 'values' are antithetical to the concept of human rights, which are supposed to derive from an alien or externally imposed Western ideology. Many Asian regimes culpable of massive human-rights violations have conveniently exploited this view to exculpate themselves and repress legitimate dissent. Powerful, so-called democratic regimes in the West have likewise used this to punish countries that have a long history of resisting Western domination. I need not belabour the US government's exhortations against human-rights abuses in China, North Korea and Mahathir's Malaysia, while turning a blind eye to, if not actively propping up, brutal dictatorships subservient to its geopolitical and economic interests.

I shall start this review of the human-rights situation in Asia with a general statement that the core human rights (e.g. the right to life, freedom from torture, freedom from slavery, freedom of thought, conscience and religion) and the civil rights of expres-

sion and assembly continue to suffer ignominious setbacks in Asia. This despite the fact that a number of military dictatorships and authoritarian regimes, prevalent in the 1970s and 1980s, had been ousted through largely non-violent people-power revolutions, as in the Philippines and South Korea. Neither has spectacular economic growth in new industrialising economies such as Singapore and Malaysia been translated into dramatic improvements in the human-rights conditions in these countries. I must add that these so-called economic miracles in Asia, achieved well before the nineties and the onset of the Asian crisis of 1997, owed nothing to corporate globalisation's prescriptions against protectionism, and had been accomplished at the high cost of exploiting cheap labour and the repression of trade-union rights.

There are many factors that explain the dismal situation of human rights in the region. For one thing, many countries in Asia have just emerged from a long history of civil wars and internecine conflicts: Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia and Timor Leste, to cite only a few examples. A culture of militarisation and repression of dissidents is very much entrenched, while the gargantuan task of reconstruction and rehabilitation has been carried out often at the expense of human rights and civil liberties. Many continue to be wracked by long-running communal conflicts and insurgencies, which have created a vicious cycle of violence and repression. Moreover, the long history of colonialism and foreign subjugation has so plundered many Asian countries as to leave them helpless and totally dependent on former colonial powers, unable to lift themselves from the quagmire of poverty and underdevelopment. This economic plunder has been exacerbated by ongoing corporate or capitalist globalisation, which has merely succeeded in

intensifying the misery of the teeming poor while concentrating wealth in the hands of a privileged few. This is at the root of many internecine conflicts and insurgencies in the region that have invited brutal repression from those in power.

Let me just give you a rundown of some of the most egregious examples of human-rights violations in our part of the globe.

As can be gleaned from widespread stories of violence against women in the region, Asian governments have failed miserably to uphold women's rights. Cross-border trafficking of women and even children—cajoled, enticed, deceived or even physically forced into the sex trade—has persisted as in Thailand, the Philippines and Myanmar. The situation has grown worse with the growing poverty and joblessness associated with globalisation. Barbaric treatment of women has persisted in some countries, like acid-throwing on women in Bangladesh for rejecting a man's advances, bride-killing for failing to provide a large enough dowry and sati or widow-burning in India which defines womanhood solely in terms of being a wife. Throngs of women forced out of their countries because of conflicts generally find themselves at risk of rape and other forms of sexual abuse as in the case of many Burmese women in the refugee camps of Bangladesh. Related to this is the increasingly serious problem of migrant workers, mostly women (hence we now talk not only of feminisation of poverty, but of feminisation of migration), who are forced by penury to abandon their own children to care for other children, and who suffer abuses and racial discrimination in their host countries. The lot of illegal migrants is even worse. Without legal protection, they are no better than indentured slaves. Defying these odds, legions of women from the Philippines have, in sheer desperation, spread across the world working as

domestic workers, caregivers and nannies, with 150,000 deployed to the city of Hong Kong alone.

The freedoms of expression, association and assembly have been under assault in many Asian countries. Direct and indirect censorship is the rule, not the exception. Myanmar's ruling military junta, which has been responsible for some of the worst atrocities against its own people, has stubbornly refused to cede power to the National League for Democracy, which was democratically elected in 1990 and whose leaders and supporters have been subjected to unremitting persecution. The Singaporean government, which has continued to impose a ban on outdoor speeches and rallies, gained notoriety anew when it arrested and detained fairly recently an opposition politician for making what normally should be an innocuous lunch-hour address to a crowd of businessmen. (You will recall that, ludicrous as it may seem, the Christian Conference of Asia, which by any measure cannot be considered subversive, was thrown out of Singapore, where it used to be based.) Through repressive policies and the notorious Internal Security Act, the Singapore government has ensured the continuation in power of the long-ruling People's Action Party. Moreover, inhuman treatment both of criminals and political prisoners persist, as in Thailand, where prisoners are shackled from foot to hand inside the court and when they are engaged in hard labour.

Asia also continues to be plagued by debilitating and utterly destructive racial, ethnic, communal, sectarian and religious conflicts, which not only have dealt a severe blow to civil liberties, but have also resulted in the uprooting of whole villages, widespread atrocities and virtual massacre of millions of people, including women and children. This problem has become even more severe since the USA launched its war on terror, which has targeted mostly Islamic militants. Internal armed conflicts, for instance in Sri Lanka, the Philippines, Indonesia and Myanmar, have led to massive displacement of civilian populations and serious problems of protection of refugees and internally displaced persons. Worse, many of the communal conflicts are widely believed to have

been instigated by army-linked provocateurs, like the series of communal riots directed against the ethnic Chinese that shook Indonesia in 1998 and 1999. In conflict-ridden Kashmir, the Indian government is known to have deployed former Hindus to assist the army in counterinsurgency operations directed mostly against Muslims. The systematic massacre, plunder, looting and cultural decimation of an entire Muslim community in Gujarat last year, claiming the lives of 2,000 people, mostly Muslims and including women and children, had been blamed by Indian authorities on Pakistan. This escalated tensions between the two nuclear-armed neighbours. In the Philippines, leaders of the failed coup plot against the Macapagal-Arroyo government last year made sensational allegations that the bombings in Mindanao in southern Philippines, officially attributed to Muslim terrorists, were in fact government sponsored. What is clear is that religious sentiments, symbols and language are being systematically exploited for political purposes, leading to even more human-rights violations. The current demonisation of some religions and cultures associated with Bush's war on terrorism has exacerbated xenophobia and racial prejudices, leading to even more discrimination and stigmatisation of innocent civilians. Moreover, freedom of religion continues to be widely violated in many countries like China and Vietnam, while persecution of religious minorities, including Christians, has persisted in Pakistan and India.

Of paramount concern to human-rights advocates and activists, specially in the context of the war on terrorism, is the hasty enactment or introduction of highly repressive measures, such as national security and emergency legislation and anti-terrorist bills patterned after the US Patriot Act in the wake of the September 11 terrorist attacks in New York. These laws are liberally used to suppress legitimate political dissent, while amplifying the powers of the police, the military and the intelligence agencies. In the Philippines, the new anti-terrorism bill introduced in the legislature has drawn widespread criticism for violating the constitution and for its catch-all ambiguity—undermining the right of national self-determination

and making many legal, militant political organisations vulnerable to state repression. Already the declaration of the open-ended 'state of violence' and 'state of lawlessness' in many areas in Mindanao, coupled with the terrorist labelling of the Communist Party and its armed wing by the USA and the European Union, has led to indiscriminate raids on Muslim villages, summary execution of youth activists and human-rights workers as well as to the revocation of the political refugee status of the Communist Party's founder exiled in the Netherlands. The highly draconian Malaysian Internal Security Act has been touted as a model of antiterrorist legislation, while India's Prevention of Terrorist Ordinance, which had already been invalidated as unconstitutional by the Indian Supreme Court, has been revived after September 11. In Hong Kong, proposals to enact Article 23 legislation against treason, subversion, secession, sedition and theft of state secrets drew huge protests.

Having said all that, it must be stressed that the groups that suffer most from the adverse effects of the denial of human rights are those who are on the margins of society—the exploited workers, landless peasants, indigenous people, women and children. Human rights are not limited to political and civil rights. Economic, social and cultural rights are just as important as civil and political rights and are an integral part of human rights. In fact the right to work and to fair conditions of work is enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.

Yet, in Asia, specially under the pressure of globalisation, these rights have been ignored and systematically violated, leading to mass impoverishment, widespread unemployment, hunger and disease. A lot of the conflicts—be they communal, ethnic or religious—and insurgencies we have described above do in fact have underlying social, political and economic causes, rooted as they are in the exclusion and marginalisation of vast numbers of the Asian population. There is no need to discuss at length the impact of globalisation on the peoples of Asia. Suffice it to say that it has intensified the exploitation both of people's labour and of the envi-

ronment, it has caused greater landlessness and misery for peasants who must contend with the flood of cheap agricultural imports from highly subsidised agricultural farms in the developed countries, it has robbed indigenous people of their ancestral lands, it has caused the closure of local industries under competition from huge conglomerates and it has promoted privatisation, resulting in massive job cutbacks and worsening unemployment. Where jobs are scarce and workers are deemed redundant or disposable, the first to fall victim are the women (many of whom end up in the sex trade), the unskilled, the migrants and the low-caste people, such as the 200 million outcasts (Dalits) in India.

Related to this are the rights to health and education, which have traditionally been neglected in many parts of Asia, but which have suffered even more under the regime of globalisation and the war on terrorism. Privatisation of many government corporations and bodies, including schools and hospitals, has meant that poor people are completely denied access to adequate health care, education and other social services.

This is aggravated by the war on terrorism, which has intensified militarisation and the arms race in the region, as limited government resources are funnelled away from social services and into the purchase of arms and support for a bloated military.

Not to be forgotten is the right to national self-determination and national sovereignty, also enshrined in the UN charter, but which has often been flagrantly violated, as in the case of West Papua, which, like the former East Timor, was forcibly integrated into Indonesia. The war on terrorism has justified the re-entry of US troops and reinforced American military presence in the Philippines, banned under the Philippine constitution, and considered a clear infringement of the country's sovereignty. Adding to fears of recolonisation in the region is renewed Japanese militarism in support of the US war on terrorism. Indeed, the attainment of effective national self-determination and territorial integrity, as an integral part of human rights, is a precondition of peace, human security and democracy.

The pathetic human-rights situation in Asia and other parts of the world poses an

urgent challenge to churches around the globe and makes human-rights advocacy an imperative. Advocacy, however, must be built on the bedrock of solidarity with those victims who are themselves struggling for their own rights and empowerment. Ecumenical bodies such as the World Council of Churches and the Christian Conference of Asia can be most effective in human-rights advocacy when they accompany, support and empower their constituencies in the regions who are engaged in a similar advocacy on the ground.

In the present context of war on terrorism, including US unilateralism and pre-emptive strikes, human-rights advocacy from an ecumenical perspective also needs to put the USA to task for undermining the integrity of the UN in an immoral quest for empire and global hegemony. Finally, human-rights advocacy cannot but go hand in hand with an unflagging critique of corporate globalisation and concrete work for justice, understood as distributive and transformative justice, which alone can build the regime of peace we in the ecumenical community have been called by our Christian faith to strive relentlessly for.



Ahn Jae Woong, CCA general secretary, and Tony Waworuntu, CCA executive secretary, visited local congregations in the different provinces of Cambodia during 15–19 February. Ahn (centre) and Tony (fourth from right) are seen with a local congregation 20 km outside the capital city of Phnom Penh.

HIV/AIDS: A challenge to theological education in Asia

A. Wati Longchar

HIV/AIDS is no longer a medical issue alone, but pervades all spheres of our lives—social, economic, political or cultural. It touches the life, behaviour and perspectives of people in human families. It brings untold stories of suffering, humiliation, discrimination and isolation. When people discover a person is HIV positive, there can be mistreatment and disownment by family members. There are cases of dismissal from a job and denial of medical treatment, housing, insurance and appearance in public places. In some instances even family members who have not been infected are mistreated. There are even cases of people with HIV/AIDS and their families being excluded from churches or refused pastoral care or funeral rites. In extreme cases, there has even been murder. The HIV crisis raises four fundamental concerns:

- **The relationship between AIDS and poverty**

Poverty is both a cause and consequence of HIV/AIDS. The increase of the disease in poor countries is alarming. The World Health Organisation estimates that nine out of ten people with HIV live in places where poverty, a subordinate status of women and children, and discrimination are prevalent. Often the unjust global economic systems forces parents to sell their daughters into commercial sex work. The global economic system, consumerism, the development model and inappropriate tourism promote HIV/AIDS, especially in developing countries. The poor, the marginalised and the displaced in rural areas and those who struggle to survive are the most vulnerable sections of society.

We need to recognise that HIV/AIDS is essentially a justice issue. It is fuelled by certain structures of oppression and injustice.

- **The relationship between AIDS and gender issues**

Economic, social, cultural and even state policies that perpetuate the subordination of women are contributing to the spread of HIV. In many societies the position of women limits their control over their bodies and their power to make decisions about reproduction. Women who have little or no education and/or live in traditional male-dominated relationships have scant access to information on HIV/AIDS and generally lack the skills and the power needed to negotiate safer sex. This is more so in the Asian context because of our cultural, religious and social norms. Therefore, women are at a far greater risk of being infected with HIV, even if they have received effective education for prevention. Women empowerment becomes the key to resist cultural and economic pressures to engage in unwanted sexual relationships. In this connection, we also need to look very seriously into men's role in spreading HIV/AIDS.

- **The human rights issue**

HIV/AIDS patients may have lost some measures of their immunity, but not their humanity and dignity. People living with HIV/AIDS are some of the most discriminated people in society. Those who bear the brunt of discrimination are often those least equipped to cope with the tragedy when it strikes. Instead of experiencing love, forgiveness, and acceptance in a time physical pain and mental suffering, often persons with HIV/AIDS

experience loneliness, prejudice and discrimination. More particularly, HIV positive women and children are at the receiving end of prejudice, social ostracism and violence. Men, women and children with HIV experience untouchability, rejection and fear and are often denied their fundamental rights to security, freedom of association, movement and adequate health care. More than the fear of an early death, most people living with HIV fear stigma and shame. Basic human rights for care and compassion are ignored. The fear of stigmatisation, marginalisation and discrimination keeps people from knowing the full love and care of the people of God, contradicting basic Christian teaching and the value of the Gospel.

- **A challenge to re-examine Christian mission and ministerial formation**

Since HIV/AIDS touches on life, cultural norms and practices, socio-economic conditions, issues of gender, human rights, economic development, human responsibility, sexuality and morality, it becomes a theological question. It demands that we re-examine pastoral care and counselling, education for prevention and social ministry. There is an urgent ministerial call for the church at large and the theological community in particular, to develop professional knowledge, moral commitment and pastoral skills to deal with this extraordinarily horrifying situation. If the church is a healing community, the issue demands that churches and the theological community create a sound theological concept and a better mechanism to care for persons affected with the disease. It also challenges the perspective and focus of the

ministerial formation program in our theological colleges and seminaries.

About 95 per cent of HIV/AIDS-infected people live in Asia and Africa. It is said that there are already about 7 million people infected with this tragic pandemic and the majority of these people do not know that they are living with it. Statistics show that India ranks second highest in the world. The disease is fast spreading in the region because of illiteracy and poverty, gender disparity, stigma, discrimination and denial, a high incidence of sexually transmitted diseases, low condom access and usage, an extensive commercial sex industry, injection drug use and population movements such as cross-border rural urban migration and trafficking etc. and low awareness of the dangers of HIV/AIDS among the general public. It has become a threat to life, development and poverty alleviation efforts. It has already affected many families, churches, communities, villagers and whole nations. We cannot afford to ignore this issue in theological education.

A look at theological curriculum

In Nagaland, a pastor was invited by a family of his congregation for prayer. Prayer was the only hope for the young man who was about to die with AIDS. The family and the patient needed support and care. The pastor came to pray, but refused to enter the room where the patient was battling for his life. He prayed from the other room and left the family without seeing the patient. The pastor was afraid that he would be infected by AIDS if he sat near the patient or touched him.

The attitude of the pastor reflects our theological education. What are theological institutions doing about this problem of HIV/AIDS and related concerns? How much space should we allot to incorporate these issues into our curriculum? Does our theological education sufficiently address eradicating or finding solutions to this problem? Do we

provide adequate knowledge and skills and a right attitude to our students to serve their churches and society more effectively in the struggle against the HIV/AIDS crisis? How do we empower theological students with analytical skills to have a deeper understanding of social, cultural and religious factors behind the spread of HIV/AIDS?

Despite Asia being one of the most affected regions by this tragic pandemic and despite many NGOs and ecumenical organisations involved in awareness programs, capacity building programs and theological reflection on the HIV/AIDS issue, theological colleges are still almost silent on this issue. When we evaluate the syllabuses of theological colleges in Asia, we will discover that almost none of the theological schools offers a course related to HIV/AIDS. Courses on biblical studies, religion and culture, pastoral care, and theology and ethics also do not provide space to reflect theologically on this crisis. As students complete their studies, they are better equipped to articulate Western theologies, but lack the skill to deal with issues such as HIV/AIDS. Why do theological colleges continue to remain silent in spite of the seriousness of the disease?

- Many churches and theological educators seem to think that this is not yet a problem yet in our context.
- Our culture does not permit us to talk about sex education openly, and churches in Asia still treat this subject as taboo
- There is a misconception of AIDS as closely associated with the abuse of sex.
- There is a fear of losing support and isolation of the college from the people and churches.
- There is a lack of awareness and the fear of social stigma and isolation of people living with HIV/AIDS.
- Many theological teachers are not well informed in guiding, designing, implementing and monitoring of HIV/AIDS prevention, care and support intervention programs.

When people with HIV/AIDS suffer isolation from friends and family members, when they are denied medical treatment, when they face dismissal from their jobs or schools, when there is the possibility of divorce and when they are accused as being cursed by

Despite Asia being one of the most affected regions by this tragic pandemic theological colleges are still almost silent on this issue

God, why do Christian ministers often remain silent? When all this stigmatisation and marginalisation takes place in our society and churches, why do Christian ministers remain silent? All this ignorance and misconception testifies to the indifferent attitude, failure and lack of perspective in the ministerial formation programs of our colleges. Theological educators have not taken this crisis seriously in their ministerial training programs. Our pastors and ministers are not equipped fully to handle people living with HIV/AIDS and their families. The challenge before us is not only to provide compassionate personal care to individuals suffering from viruses and disease, but also to transform the structures of capitalism, patriarchy and racism (casteism) that cause and spread HIV/AIDS.

It is said that the most effective agent that nourishes HIV/AIDS is 'silence'. The more we are silent about HIV/AIDS, the more rampant it becomes. Since HIV/AIDS has already taken root and is fast spreading in Asia, the silence in theological education on this issue will contribute not only to the spread of HIV/AIDS epidemic in our society, but will also will contribute to prejudice, pain and marginalisation as well.

A historical situation where a new articulation of theological education is urgently required. HIV/AIDS demands an urgent response. Our churches will lose the significance of ministry in wider human society if we are not sensitive to the new challenges we are caught up in today. It is imperative that theological studies move into new areas and struggle on the theological implications of is-

sues such as HIV/AIDS, religious fundamentalism, media and technology, the globalisation of the market and so on. If our pastors, missionaries and ministers are not equipped to respond to these new challenges, they will fail to play a transformative role in the human community.

The need of the hour in Asia is to re-design curricula in such a way that they bring transformation in the lives of theological students. To do so, HIV/AIDS issues must be integrated into the theological curriculum. For example, systematic theology could reflect on such issues as the meaning of suffering in the context of AIDS. Christian ethics could include issues such as human sexuality and the changing nature of family life. Feminist theology should challenge the issues of women's biological, cultural and economic vulnerability to the threat of AIDS. Contextual theologies such as Dalit theology, Minjung theology and tribal theology should challenge us as to how the new forms of untouchability, marginalisation and stigmatisation that HIV/AIDS brings are reinforced on marginalised people. These distinct perspectives and issues could be brought together by offering interdisciplinary courses with particular focus on HIV/AIDS. To make theological education effective and relevant, the theological community also needs to come into contact with the reality of HIV/AIDS face to face. Field education programs in theological education have proved to be effective in many parts of the world. Exposure to AIDS care centres and interaction with people living with AIDS will deepen students' perspectives on the issue. In addition, new forms of liturgy and worship could be created to promote AIDS awareness and sensitivity.

Our faith in the God of life and hope compels us to fight against all forces that diminish, destroy or kill life. Theological education is vital and a key instrument to bring fullness of life to all. While there is a growing awareness and sensitivity among theological educators sometimes the existing curriculum lacks sharpness and scope for theological reflection to address concerns such as HIV/AIDS. A sharper direction and clarity is needed. An introduction of one or two courses at BTh and BD or MDiv level courses and integration of HIV/AIDS concerns within

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the existing curricula of Christian theology, ethics, religions and society, women's study, pastoral care and counselling could make a big difference. External programs or distance theological education learning should also include this subject.

To fight HIV/AIDS is a theological and an ethical imperative. It ranks with such issues as poverty, gender injustice and social discrimination. The disease destroys fullness of life in God. Since life itself is God's will for humankind and creation as a whole, it must be protected from all destructive forces. Every person reflects the mystery and glory of God. To treat any person as less than valuable is contrary to Christian faith, it is to deny the special sacredness of human life. Donald E. Messer writes that 'stigmatisation and discrimination are blasphemous actions against God as well as individual persons. God is incognito in every person'. Since women and men, regardless of their class, ethnicity, races, age and religion, are created in God's image and loved by God, Christians are called to treat and cooperate with every person and community irrespective of race, caste or religion, with respect and care. As communities of faith we have not demonstrated enough that the church of Jesus Christ offers love, acceptance, forgiveness and healing—not judgment, prejudice, stigmatisation or discrimination. The church as the body of Christ is to be the place where God's healing love is experienced and shown forth. As the body of Christ, the church is bound to enter into the suffering of others, to stand with them against all rejection and despair. The church as a community of faith in Christ ought to be a healing community where people in pain experience love and

acceptance, not judgment, prejudice, stigmatisation and discrimination. It is sinful to discriminate and stigmatise people living with HIV/AIDS.

Achieving the goal through networking

Considering the seriousness of the disease, many ecumenical partners such as Christian Aid, Dan Church Aid, Norwegian Church Aid, Church World Service and World Vision, are actively involved in many ways and making significant works in the region. The Central Committee of the World Council of Churches also mandated the formation of a consultative group to conduct a study on HIV/AIDS that would help the ecumenical movement to shape its response in the three areas of theology and ethics, pastoral care and the church as healing community, and justice and human rights. The CCA has been also deeply involved in this awareness program. To enhance realising life in its fullness, the Mission and Ecumenical Formation (MEF) team of WCC has been focusing on the educational dimension of the problem with theological colleges. With the initiative of MEF, an HIV/AIDS curriculum for theological colleges in Africa has been prepared and it is now widely used. Combating and eradicating HIV/AIDS is a serious ecumenical agenda today.

The Christian community's effort to combat the HIV crisis is only part of what the entire human community is doing in caring for AIDS. Many NGOs, faith communities and governmental organisations are also deeply involved in struggles for justice and care for people living with AIDS. There is a need for the churches and theological community to learn from their experiences to strengthen commitment and action. There are many things we cannot do alone, but in collaboration with civil society movements and other faith communities, we will be able to achieve our goal.

In the global effort to fight HIV/AIDS, the theological seminaries can also make a significant role in relieving and eradicating the stigma, breaking the silence, encouraging people to stand in solidarity with those living with HIV/AIDS, and create a community of acceptance, understanding, love, compassion, care and treatment.

India



Enos Das Pradhan

Rev. **Enos Das Pradhan** took over as the general secretary of the Church of North India (CNI) in October 2003. Rev. Pradhan, who has served as the treasurer of the CNI for eight years, was selected by the 72nd Synod Executive Committee meeting to lead the CNI, headquartered in New Delhi. Pradhan, who hails from Darjeeling in the West Bengal state of India, has several years experience as financial manager, social and political worker and church leader. He has a master's degree from the Tribhuvan University in Kathmandu, Nepal, and a diploma in community work from Birmingham in the United Kingdom. Pradhan has been a member of the CNI Synod since 1971. He is a former secretary of the CNI diocese of Eastern Himalaya. From 1968 to 1977 he served as the diocesan youth secretary. He founded the Nepali Girls Social Service Centre in Darjeeling. He is also a former treasurer of the CNI Synodical Board of Social Services. Pradhan has a wife, Anuradha, and three daughters.

Dr **Pauline Sathiamurthy** has been re-elected as the general secretary of the Church of South India (CSI) for the next two years at its 29th synod held in Bangalore. Pauline, who has a doctorate in English literature, is a former professor at the Heber College

in Tiruchirapalli, Tamil Nadu, in India. The synod, held 10–14 January, also elected Bishop **B.P. Sugandhar** as moderator and Bishop **S. Vasanthakumar** as the deputy moderator of CSI. Mr **V. Kasthuri** is the new honorary treasurer.

Hong Kong



Jane Chui Chun Nei

The Church of Christ in China, Hong Kong Council (HKCCC), has ordained **Jane Chui Chun Nei** as a minister. Jane, a former librarian of CCA, is the twelfth woman minister of the church, which started ordaining women in 1966. She serves as the lead minister of the Shim Oi Church in Hong Kong. On her ministry, she says, 'What makes me fascinated about my ministry is people, including myself and our relationship with God and with neighbours.'

The Senate of Serampore (University) has given an honorary doctorate to Rev. **David Gill** at a function held in Pune, in the western Indian state of Maharashtra. David Gill, a former general secretary of the National Council of Churches in Australia, is currently a pastor of the Kowloon Union Church in Hong Kong. He is also a former

executive staff member of the World Council of Churches. David is a member of the Order of Australia and a recipient of the Australian Centenary Medal for his service to the church and society. The Senate of Serampore governs a large number of theological colleges in different parts of India. Besides awarding degrees to theological students, it also gives honorary doctorates to distinguished church and ecumenical leaders.

Philippines

Ms **Sharon Rose Joy Ruiz-Duremdes** has been unanimously re-elected as the general secretary of the National Council of Churches in the Philippines (NCCP) at its November 2003 general convention. Sharon, a member of the CCA general committee, in 2000 became the first woman general secretary of the NCCP. She is a theologically trained lay church leader, church educator and a member of the Convention of the Baptist Churches. A former staff member of the Central Philippine University, she served as the coordinator of the West Visayas Ecumenical Council. She worked as the executive secretary of the Ecumenical Council for Development. Sharon has taught at the College of Theology of the Central Philippine University after studies in the United States of America. She served as a youth worker in an Indonesian church before doing her theological studies.

Australia

Bishop **Oliver Heywood**, a former president of the Australian Council of Churches, passed away on 16 December 2003. He was 77. He was the Anglican bishop of Bendigo in Australia for 16 years. A Rhodes scholar, Bishop Heywood had his theological training at the Cuddesdon Theological College in England. He was ordained in the Chichester diocese in England, from where he returned to Australia to become the warden of Christ's College in the University of Tasmania from 1963 to 1971.

Asian Rural Institute leaders' training

Since 1973 the Asian Rural Institute, a training institute for rural workers, has been training community leaders from the developing countries of Asia, Africa and the Pacific.

More than 800 graduates are working in 48 nations as extension workers, directors of training programs, church workers, teachers, farmers and community leaders.

ARI seeks candidates for training who work at the grassroots, serving some of the most marginalised people of their countries. It emphasises the recruitment and training of women to enable them to participate fully and equally in the life of society.

ARI includes community members of many faiths, encouraging everyone to deepen their spiritual roots while serving those in need. English is the common language of ARI and its training course.

If you need more information about ARI or the application form for the training program, write to the CCA Office in Hong Kong.

WSCF General Assembly 2004

The World Student Christian Federation's (WSCF) 33rd General Assembly will be held in Chiang Mai, Thailand, on 5–14 August 2004 with the theme, 'Talitha Cum! Arise to Life in Abundance!' (Mark 5:41)

The general assembly is the highest and most representative body of the WSCF, charged with the tasks of choosing leadership, reviewing the work and life of the federation and planning programs for the period between assemblies.

The 2004 assembly will gather about 150 students and 50 senior friends and partners from across the world to worship, fellowship, celebrate and take responsibility to proclaim life through all their programs and projects over the next four years.

Although its focus is on students, the federation sees itself as a wider community, which includes senior friends and partners who have faithfully supported the work over the past 108 years. It is therefore of great importance that all categories that constitute its community are present at the forthcoming assembly. You are therefore invited to attend. Please keep the federation in your prayers as it prepares for the assembly.

For more information, contact the WSCF at wscf@wscf.ch.

Towards an interfaith approach to gender justice

An interfaith consultation on gender justice and genuine partnership of women and men will be held on 14–19 May in Bangkok, Thailand. It is being planned to gather representatives from four religions in Asia: Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam and Christianity.

The consultation is a follow-up to the interreligious cooperation in Asia held in Parapat, Indonesia, in April 2003, where issues of gender justice among the four religions figured prominently. The participants of that consultation recommended to 'examine the patriarchal theologies, structures and practices of our religions and cultures in order to empower women by developing alternative educational resources for the promotion of equal partnership between women and men'.

A continuation committee composed of representatives of the four religions has been planning this consultation: Rose Wu (Christian, Hong Kong), Ma'arif Jamuin (Muslim, Indonesia), Raja Rajeswari (Hindu, India), and Lapapan Supamanta (Buddhist, Thailand). Coopted to help with the planning are Hope Antone (CCA-FMU), Corazon Tabing-Reyes (EGY), Shellah Zegada (Asia-Pacific Alliance of YMCAs) and Max Ediger (DAGA Justpeace Centre).

The consultation will include storytelling of personal experiences highlighting how

women and men are imaged, treated and regarded in the different religions and case studies of women-men partnership, or the lack of it, in their respective countries.

Panel presentations will be made on the theme "Living Our Faiths as Women and Men in Community" from the perspectives of the four religions.

There will also be workshops on socio-political impacts on gender relations in faith communities and how they reinforce gender injustice and on religious-cultural impacts, and how they also contribute to gender injustice.

The organisers hope that the consultation will end with action planning on what religious communities can do together to work towards a common vision of justice in relations and genuine partnership between women and men.

Communion of Churches in India

Three major Indian churches have come together to form the Communion of Churches in India.

The Mar Thoma Church, the Church of South India (CSI) and the Church of North India (CNI) have formally agreed to exist as a single entity and to work together even while retaining their individual existence.

Bishop Philipose Mar Chrysostum, Metropolitan of the Mar Thoma Church, Bishop B.P Sugandhar, Moderator of the Church of South India, and Bishop James Teron, Moderator of the Church of North India lit a lamp to signify the new formation during a function held on 9 March in Aluva, in Kerala.

A declaration highlighting the major features of the coming together was read on the occasion in the presence of representatives and leaders of the three churches.

Daniel Acharuparambil, Latin Catholic Archbishop in Kerala attended the function.

The initiatives for the unification of the three churches began in the early 1970s. They were strengthened when the Mar Thoma, CSI and CNI Joint Council was formed in 1978. The three churches are members of CCA.

Sam Kobia installed as WCC general secretary

The Rev. Dr Samuel Kobia was formally installed on 18 February as the new WCC general secretary at a prayer service held during the WCC executive committee meeting in Geneva. The committee discussed, among other things, interreligious dialogue, HIV/AIDS, plans for the WCC's ninth assembly and statements on the critical international situation. It agreed to a proposal to convene a major multireligious international conference to provide an opportunity to reflect on issues arising from the present state of relations between religious communities, as well as those challenging religious people in today's world. According to Kobia, 'Interreligious dialogue is increasingly an imperative in our contemporary world, and will be one of the top priorities for the WCC in coming years.' The next meeting of the executive committee will be held in Korea in August 2004.

Youth conference

The role of the media, journalism, the Internet and building communities were some of the issues discussed at a youth conference organised by the diocese of Hyderabad of the Church of Pakistan. The conference gathered 99 participants, including some from the diocese of Karachi.

According to Mr Eric Attique, assistant youth coordinator, and one of the organisers of the conference, 'It was a great learning experience for everyone, and we are very thankful to our distinguished speakers who came to share their valuable thoughts and suggestions on the topics.'

Among those who spoke at the conference were Rev. Ishaq M. Gill, Mr Eric Attique, Ms Shomaila Jennifer, Rev. Daniel Fiaz, Mr Saleem Iqbal, Ms Jane Jarred, Ms Evangeline Richard, Mr Ashraf Mall, Ms Rupa Daniel and Rev. George Gulzar. Rafiq Masih, Bishop of Hyderabad, stressed the importance of hard work and discipline.

CCA receives ECOSOC status

The United Nations has granted special consultative status to the Christian Conference of Asia. This was decided by the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) at a meeting held in February 2004 in New York. Hanifa Mezoui, Chief of the UN NGO section said that CCA can now designate official representatives to the UN headquarters in New York, and in Geneva and Vienna as well as to the five regional commissions.

NCCI denounces corruption

The 25th general assembly of the National Council of Churches in India has warned that 'the church faces the danger of losing sight of its role and purpose in this world if corruption is not condemned and rooted out of the church'. It urged churches to engage in an exercise of introspection to consider their own failures and weaknesses and to live up to kingdom values. 'The leaders of the church are expected to be role models in leading an exemplary and simple life, being accountable to the church and to the society.'

Delegates from 29 member churches, regional councils, related agencies and national Christian organisations attended the 10–13 February assembly, held in the southern Indian town of Tirunelveli on the theme, 'Towards truth and peace: Celebrating our common pilgrimage'.

The assembly urged the Indian churches to affirm the role and participation of youth and give them important roles in the decision-making processes of the church.

It called upon the government of India to safeguard the secular fabric of the nation and to protect the fundamental rights of citizens as enshrined in the Indian constitution.

The church body also urged the government to condemn and combat all communal and fascist forces existing in any religion and cultures, 'as it jeopardises the relationship of living together as community'.

Organising committees for assembly formed

Preparations for the 12th general assembly of CCA are gaining momentum. The assembly will be held from 31 March to 6 April 2005 in Chiang Mai, Thailand.

The first CCA—Church of Christ in Thailand (CCT) local organising committee meeting was held on 29–30 January in Chiang Mai and fourteen subcommittees under a CCA-CCT general liaison and supervision committee have been formed.

Four hundred delegates from different parts of Asia, the Pacific and outside are expected to attend the assembly on the theme 'Building communities of peace for all'.

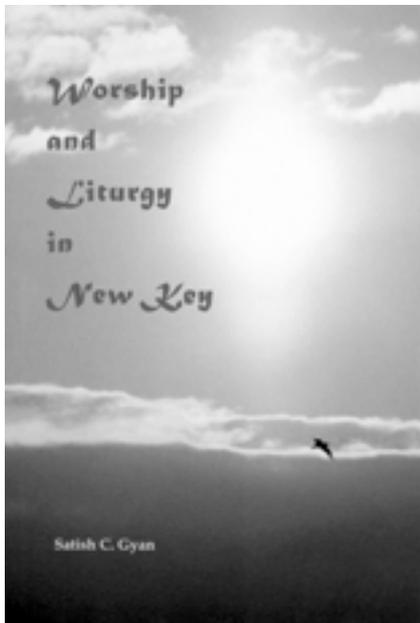
NCCJ graduates' gathering

The Division of Education of the National Christian Council in Japan held its fifth annual ecumenical gathering of 22 new graduates from several seminaries around Tokyo, organised to give them opportunities to learn about the ecumenical movement and to strengthen ecumenical networks before they are sent out to local churches. Participants came from the Anglican Church, Baptist Convention, Baptist Union, Evangelical Lutheran Church, Church of Nazarene, Salvation Army, United Church of Christ (Kyodan) and the Korean Christian Church in Japan.

Ms Suzuki Reiko, moderator of NCCJ and a peace activist, spoke on 'Ecumenical movement and peace—they shall beat their swords into ploughshares'. The participants visited the Board of Publications of Kyodan, the NCC Centre for the Study of Japanese Religions, the Commission on Literature of NCCJ, the Japan Bible Society and offices of Christian organisations and denominations at the Christian Centre Building in Tokyo. Rev. Yamamoto Toshimasa, NCCJ general secretary, gave the closing message.

—Nishio Misao

Latest CCA publication



Worship and Liturgy in New Key is the latest publication from CCA. It is a collection of 15 liturgies prepared by Rev. Dr Satish Gyan over a period of more than 15 years.

‘These liturgies are contextual, and some are Indian—specifically north Indian—in flavour and symbolism,’ says Satish Gyan in the preface of the book.

Satish started producing ‘people-centred’ liturgies in the early 1980s when he was the general secretary of the Student Christian Movement of India (SCMI). He received encouragement from friends, especially Ahn Jae Woong, who was then the regional secretary of the World Student Christian Federation, to produce more liturgies, which he did after leaving the SCMI to become a professor of religion at the Leonard Theological College, in the central Indian town of Jabalpur.

Satish Gyan, a former third-world missionary to the United Methodist Church in the USA, has written these liturgies focusing on the ‘people in the pews’. They have the potential to encourage readers, clergy, youth and students to prepare and produce new indigenous and contextual liturgies suitable to their contexts.

Russian Orthodox leader honoured



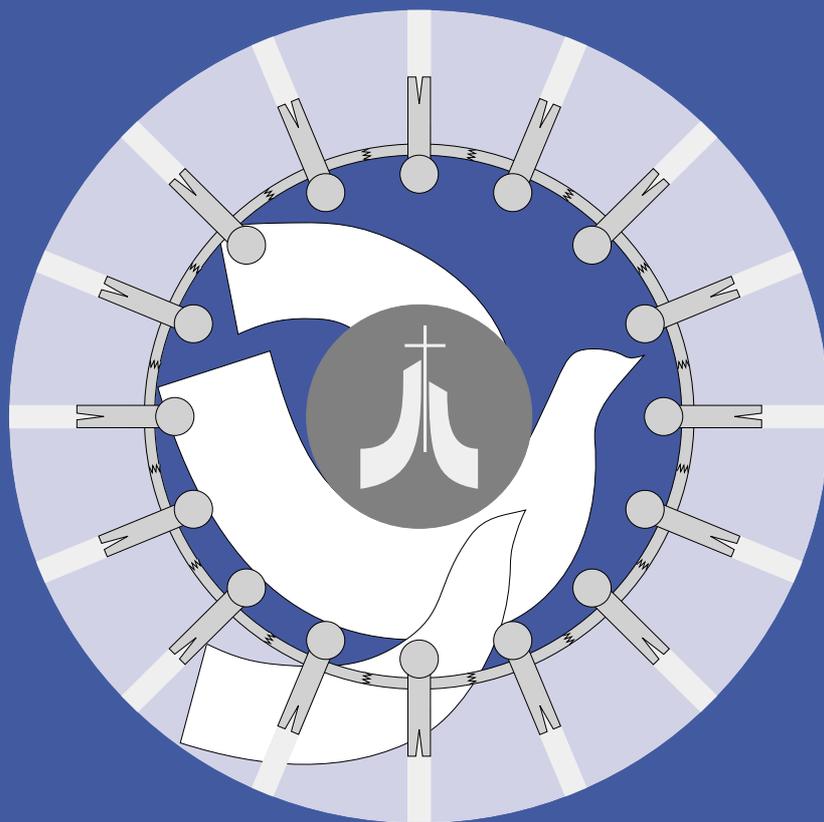
CCA and the Communion of Churches in Indonesia jointly hosted a reception in honour of H.E. Metropolitan Kirill, chairman of the Department for External Relations of Moscow Patriarchate of the Russian Orthodox Church in December in Jakarta. CCA general secretary Ahn Jae Woong delivered the welcome speech. The PGI general secretary Dr Izak P Lambe and Russian Ambassador Mr Vladimir Plotnikov addressed the gathering. Pictured are Fr Oleg, Ahn Jae Woong, Metropolitan Kirill and Mr Dimitry Petrovsky

Korean church leader visits CCA Centre



Rev. Dr Kim Soon Kwon (front, fourth from left), president of NCC-Korea and moderator of the Presbyterian Church in Korea, during his visit to the CCA Centre in January, with CCA staff (front) Lee Hong Jung, Hope Antone, Prawate Khid-arn, Ahn Jae Woong, Philip Mathew and (behind) Cora Tabing-Reyes and Tony Waworuntu

Building communities of peace for all



CCA
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Christian Conference of Asia
Twelfth General Assembly
Chiang Mai, Thailand
31 March – 6 April 2005

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