



cca news



Peace building

Building
communities
of peace
for all

WSCF assembly

Asia
Ecumenical
Academy

Sam Kobia
visits CCA

Peace building



Cover: The garden at the CCA Centre in Hong Kong (photo: Philip Mathew)

*We have to
constantly
engage in
building peace
in our midst*

Peace building has been a sharp focus of CCA in recent years. The forthcoming General Assembly of CCA will gather some 450 participants on the theme, 'Building communities of peace for all'. The Decade to Overcome Violence focus on Asia in 2005 will also be on the same theme. These events have the potential to place peace concerns on top of the agenda of Asian churches.

Many innocent people were killed or kidnapped in recent days in places such as Iraq, Russia and other parts of the world. The need for and the importance of peacemaking should get our highest priority. Peacemaking initiatives should take centre stage in any ecumenical discourse and activities in the coming years. In this connection, Hope Antone's articulation in this issue on the theme of the CCA assembly and the DOV focus on Asia in 2005 merits attention. This issue also has other stories relating to peace building and peacekeeping. Max Edigar's reflection is one of them.

WCC General Secretary Sam Kobia's visit to Hong Kong in early July was an important event. He visited the CCA Centre and met with CCA staff. He spoke to them about the ecumenical agenda in the 21st century. He also addressed two other important meetings, one on Christian-Theravada Buddhist consultation at Tao Fong Shan Ecumenical Centre and a youth gathering of the Hong Kong Christian Council, organised as part of its 50th anniversary celebrations. CCA arranged a dinner reception for over 40 ecumenical leaders, hosted by the Most Rev. Peter Kwong, primate of Sheng Kung Hui (Anglican Church) of Hong Kong and Macau. Later, Kobia left for Australia and the Pacific.

Another important event was the Asia Ecumenical Academy, which was held for three weeks in Chiang Mai, Thailand, in order to consolidate the ecumenical leadership formation for CCA constituencies. As usual two representatives from the Pacific Conference of Churches sent participants. The in-depth ecumenical and theological reflections that took place were deeply appreciated by the participants. We are grateful to Dr Preman Niles for his leadership as dean of the AEA and Cora Tabing-Reyes for her contribution as the staff member.

Ranjan Solomon's piece on tourism is thought provoking, as the issue is still relevant and deserves to be taken seriously in the ecumenical circles.

We are happy to share some stories of the 33rd General Assembly of the WSCE, also in Chiang Mai, held for the first time in Asia since 1977. The assembly elected some fine leaders for the next quadrennium. The Asia-Pacific region of the WSCE, which had its regional committee meeting prior to the assembly, played a significant role in organising this major event.

Before I conclude, let me stress that we have to respect life in its wholeness and reject whatever negates it. This is a major ecumenical task in our times. In order to achieve this, we have to constantly engage in building peace in our midst.

—Abn Jae Woong

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Volume 39 • Number 3 • September 2004

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Talitha cum

Asia hosts the WSCF assembly

As a local choir sang Thai traditional hymns, 175 students, youth and senior friends from across the globe walked into a hall in Chiang Mai, Thailand, on 7 August to attend a worship marking the formal opening of the general assembly of the World Student Christian Federation.

The 33rd WSCF general assembly, which had as its theme 'Talitha Cum! Arise to Life in Abundance!' (Mark 5:41), gathered participants from Africa, Europe, Latin America, the Caribbean, the Middle East, North America and Asia-Pacific, with delegates over 50 countries. The WSCF, founded in 1895, comprises Student Christian Movements and student ministries across the world, and serves as an ecumenical forum of students across boundaries of culture, race and denomination.

The participants brought symbols of life and peace from their regions, which they dedicated at the altar during the opening worship. A video depicting the struggles for life and peace of SCMs in the WSCF Asia-Pacific region was screened, and the opening hymn was the Korean 'Ososo, Ososo'.

One of the highlights of the worship was a Thai traditional dance of life and peace by Sawitree Shoji from the local Payap University's Christian Communication Institute.

Dr Ahn Jae Woong, general secretary of the Christian Conference

of Asia, in the opening worship sermon, told the members and senior friends of the WSCF not to lose the movement's character. 'If it loses that it is difficult to recover its identity as a movement,' he said.

Ahn Jae Woong compared the ecumenical movement with the mustard seed (Mathew 13:31-32), which is the smallest of all seeds but, when it grows up, is the biggest of all plants. It becomes a tree, so that birds come and make their nests in its branches. 'The mustard seed is life in itself. The seed must sprout and grow up to become a tree. Similarly, the SCM should regenerate its life and work for the federation. The SCM should grow up with vitality and make the ecumenical movement strong and dynamic,' Ahn, a former staff member of the WSCF Asia-Pacific region, told the gathering. According to him, the ecumenical movement was the smallest of all when it began. But, when it grew up as a movement, when it became a global ecumenical movement, when people got involved in the different kinds of activities and programs within, it took an entirely different image.

He said that the WSCF is a creative movement within the ecumenical community and it has provided direction and leadership for the entire ecumenical movement. Disagreeing with those who make cynical and humiliating remarks about the WSCF that it is dead or it is not visible in the ecumenical movement, Ahn said that it was only sleeping, just like the snakes do during winter.



The 33rd general assembly of the World Student Christian Federation in session in Chiang Mai, Thailand

Students urged to be involved in their country's sociopolitical and economic life

The general assembly of the World Student Christian Federation called on the student Christian movements around the world to relate more closely with communities affected by the ill effects of globalization and to make direct contacts with farmers, workers, migrants, Dalits and tribals, who have been affected by the negative impact of globalization. 'Living and struggling together with the affected communities will build solidarity and better understanding between the SCMs and the marginalised groups of our societies,' the assembly of the WSCF said in a statement.

It recommended organising exposure programs for SCM members at the regional, biregional and interregional levels, and promoting programs reflecting the concerns and rights of migrant workers.

It asked the WSCF to make use of all its communication channels to share information on globalisation, 'so that the movements at all levels can enrich and challenge each other. This would help the SCMs to develop alternatives to the prevailing unjust models and devise creative methods of campaigning,' the statement said. The assembly urged the SCMs to get involved in social, economic and political life in their countries, and recommended them to work with like-minded people and groups on issues like HIV/AIDS, peace, and women.

Involvement in interfaith dialogue and activities was another area for the SCMs to focus their attention on.

It stressed the need for giving importance to direct exchange and sharing of experience between movements at the regional and interregional levels.

Among the several assembly recommendations was the setting up of a formal structure for senior friends called 'Interregional Senior Friends Network'.

According to a new vision statement adopted at the Chiang Mai assembly:

- The WSCF is a global community of Student Christian Movements committed to dialogue, ecumenism, social justice and peace.
- Our mission is to empower students in critical thinking on constructive transformation of our world by being a space for (a) prayer and celebration, (b) theological reflection, (c) study and analysis of social and cultural processes and (d) solidarity and action across boundaries of culture, gender and ethnicity.
- Through the work of the Holy Spirit, the WSCF is called to be a prophetic witness in church and society.

The pre-assembly meeting of women in a statement said that the 'SCM has the potential to transform the future of the church.' The 55 women who attended the pre-assembly meeting wanted women and men to share leadership roles and responsibilities in the church and wanted women to be encouraged and supported to take up leading roles in the church.



Traditional Thai dance performed at the opening worship

'It is only a matter of time when it will rise up again,' he added.

As a faith-based social movement, he wanted the SCM to get up from its long slumber and work hard to participate in people's struggle in the present time.

During the worship, the participants witnessed the unveiling of a large banner with messages collected from different regions of the WSCF before it was brought to be displayed at the assembly.

Among the various objectives of the WSCF is to train and nurture members to advance academically. It also aims to provide them with sound theological insights and help them become ecumenically active in the church.

Higher education, globalisation, HIV/AIDS, women and gender were some of the issues that received the attention of the week-long general assembly, the most representative body of the WSCF.

The general assembly is also a time of global fellowship to strengthen the love and faith to bind the WSCF as a prophetic community and to define policies and programs for the next quadrennium. The assembly also provides an opportunity to worship, build friends across boundaries and share stories of hope and faith.

It was the first time for 27 years that a



Opening worship

WSCF assembly had been held in Asia. The last was in Colombo in 1977.

Delivering the keynote address on higher education, Dr Wong Wai Ching from the Chinese University of Hong Kong, also a former staff member of the WSCF Asia-Pacific region, and a CCA president, said that 'globalisation has made education a commodity'. She suggested continuous questioning of hierarchies

and domination, and persistent demands for equality and justice as some of the ways for countering the negative impact of globalisation. Wai Ching also suggested joining alliances and movements around the world for achieving 'the highest common aspirations of the people'.

The senior friends of the WSCF Asia-Pacific Region met on the second day of the assembly for sharing and discussion. They decided to enlarge the regional Financial Supporting Group from five to seven by including Singapore and Malaysia. The meeting also urged the regional WSCF to continue to give high priority to leadership formation programs.

Also on the second day of the assembly, the participants in different groups went on exposure trips relating to different issues such as HIV/AIDS, poverty, environment, indigenous people, organic farming, alternative learning, human rights, justice and peace issues.

Prior to the formal opening of the assembly, the men and women participants had separate pre-assembly meetings. It was the first time in the WSCF assembly's history that men had organised a pre-assembly meeting, and they provided an excellent male choir for the opening worship.

—Philip Mathew



WSCF senior friends meeting. From left: Ken Guest, Ahn Jae Woong, Marshal Fernando, Philip Mathew, Taku Kumakiri, Glenda Rocas, Wong Tin Jin and Shin Seung Min

New WSCF leaders

Ken Guest



Dr Kenneth J. Guest was elected chairperson of the World Student Christian Federation at its recent assembly in Chiang Mai, Thailand. Ken Guest is an assistant professor of cultural anthropology at Baruch College at the City University of New York. His current research is on religion and transitional migration in Fuzhou, China, and New York. Last year he published a book on this subject, *God in Chinatown: Religion and Survival in New York's Evolving Immigrant Community* (New York University Press, 2003). Ken was raised in Florida. His grandparents were Methodist missionaries in India and the Philippines, and his mother is a retired United Methodist minister. He has a son, Thomas Luke, who is nine years old. Ken obtained a BA in East Asia studies and Chinese language at Columbia University, an MA in religious studies from Union Theological Seminary and a PhD in anthropology from the City University of New York. From 1989 to 1995 Ken Guest was executive secretary, youth and student ministries, of the General Board of Global Ministries of the United Methodist Church in the USA. He was involved in reviving the United States Student Christian Movement and has a strong involvement with WSCF, having been on the WSCF US trustees since 1989 (president since 1995), and on the Board of Trustees of the WSCF's Centennial Fund for five years, the last two as chair. Ken's local church is the United Methodist church of St Paul and St Andrew in New York City, where he is song leader and chairs the board of trustees. In what spare time he has he enjoys bicycling and is a baseball and soccer coach.

Michael Wallace

The new co-secretary general of WSCF is Michael Wallace from Aotearoa New Zealand, where he has been youth and schools coordinator of Christian World Service, his country's ecumenical aid and development agency.

Michael has had a long-standing involvement with WSCF in positions of responsibility at local, national and international levels. He first joined SCM when he was a student at the University of Otago and was secretary of the SCM there.

He became involved at the national level, being national secretary in 1995–1997. In 2003 he was appointed convenor of the National Coordinating Group of SCM Aotearoa.

Michael Wallace is well known in the Asia Pacific region, first representing his country at a joint WSCF-CCA program in Bangkok in 1995. He has been an Asia-Pacific proxy on the executive committee for two quadrennia.

He has been a high school teacher in Japan, a teacher of English as a foreign language and manager of a fair trade shop in Ireland and managed a book exchange in Aotearoa NZ. He is married with one child, has qualifications in music, theology, teaching and ecumenics.

Michael is a member of the Anglican Church and has represented that church on the executive committee of the Conference of Churches in Aotearoa New Zealand. Michael describes himself as being passionate about ecumenism, global justice and the WSCF.



Peace building

God's ordained ecumenical task

Pace studies and conflict transformation should become the basis for people to live in peace, free from fear and all obstacles, said the CCA General Secretary Dr Ahn Jae Woong.

Delivering the 11th M.A. Thomas Memorial Lecture in Bangalore, India, on 31 July, Ahn Jae Woong noted that 'peace making or peace building is God's ordained ecumenical task'. Major religions of the world and faith-based communities teach about peace and involve in peace-building efforts, he said and added that 'profound words like Shanti, Salam and Shalom should not only be chanted but also practised in our family, work places, every communities and our day-to-day lives'. He suggested militarisation, institutionalisation of violence, conflict analysis, war, non-violent struggles, structures of domination and human rights as some of the possible areas for peace studies.

One can become a peace builder by building peace movements and strengthening peace networks in the society and in the community, he told a gathering of ecumenical leaders, bishops, pastors, intellectuals and social activists. Peace forums, peace campaigns, peace camps, peace concerts, peace film festivals, peace trips and peace pilgrimages were among a list he recommended as possible ways of promoting peace in the community.

In his lecture on 'Building a culture of peace in Asia today', Ahn suggested exchange of people and experts as a way for stimulating and building a culture of peace. 'Exposure to places like Hiroshima and Nagasaki in Japan and the killing fields of Cambodia and wherever cruelty of humanity has taken place has the potential to make people committed to be peace lovers, peace makers, peace builders and peace keepers,' he told the gathering.



Ahn Jae Woong delivering the M.A. Thomas Memorial Lecture in Bangalore (photo: ECC)

Meeting together and encouraging one another to overcome the weaknesses and the tendency to remain a silent majority was suggested as another way of building a culture of peace in the society. 'As long as we remain a silent majority, justpeace will never stay with us,' he added.

The CCA leader gave a definition of culture as 'the total of the passed-on ideas, beliefs, values and knowledge, which constitute the basis for social action.' He categorised culture as high reflected in arts, literature and philosophy and low as popular culture or working people's culture. A culture of peace, according to him, means that high and low cultures are closely intertwined in every level in building and keeping peace in our daily life.

Ahn Jae Woong told the gathering that traditional or dominant cultures are challenged by countercultures for the betterment of people's life. The tension between traditional cultures and countercultures may be able to provide a new synthesis—a new culture. The new synthesis or the new culture could be the culture of peace.

Ahn expressed the view that 'moral values of freedom and accountability of Western

society and the community solidarity and social order of Eastern society may be a good solid ground for building a culture of peace in our time.' 'A stage of synthesis, a culture of peace, should be an ideal, based on the East and West as well as global value system of people's aspiration for good life.'

Referring to the current Asian situation, Ahn Jae Woong noted that 'Asia will emerge as one of the global powers in the 21st century.' Quoting a former Australian prime minister, Paul Keating, as saying that 'while the 20th century was the century of the Americans, the chances are that the 21st century will be the century of Asia, and we will see for the first time an eclipse of the American economic power.'

Ahn noted that the six-party talks to resolve the nuclear issues in North Korea could be a possible framework of global hegemonic power in the future.

'The US is worried about her role as sole global power and domination, whereas the European Union is shaping its power and Asia is consolidating its potential power at the moment,' he said.

Making a reference to the people in Asia who, like people anywhere in the world, aspire for a good and quality life, the general secretary said that, 'Good life is possible only if every human being have their day-to-day life based on wellbeing,' and 'when basic livelihood, good health, good social relations, security and freedom are guaranteed.'

The M.A. Thomas Memorial Lectures are organised annually by the Ecumenical Christian Centre (ECC) to honour its founder-director Rev. Dr M.A. Thomas, who was a well-known ecumenical leader and a Mar Thoma priest.

—Philip Mathew

Preserving our history

Library training on archive management

Forty-two participants, 19 women and 23 men (including two special participants), and twelve facilitators from 20 countries came together at the Ecumenical Resource Centre of the United Theological College, Bangalore, India, from 1 to 30 June 2004 for a program entitled 'Library Training on Archive Management'. The participants represented various church traditions and other faith traditions. The majority were librarians working in colleges and universities (both theological and secular), while some were teachers and church workers connected with archive programs in their respective institutions, such as national councils of churches and church archives organizations.

The following resource persons facilitated the training program: Bishop Gladstone (keynote address), Rita England (role and significance of archive/resource management), John England (scope, diversity, adventure of Asian-Pacific resources), Gerald Anderson (interpretation and preservation of mission history), Hope Antone (ecumenical and ministerial formation and librarians), Paul Jenkins (conservation and management of oral histories and photography), Joseph Patmury (preservation of history through dance, song, play and other artistic forms and expressions),

George Oommen (preservation and interpretation of Asian resources), Aileen Hooi-Ai (methods of preservation of oral tradition), Rev. Karmito (Rome 2002 Consultation of Rescuing the Memory of our People—challenges for Asia-Pacific librarians/archivists) Martha Smalley (scientific and technical management of archives, and technique and preservation of history/tradition through information technology), M.K. Bhandi (management and interpretation of artefacts), Mrinalini Sebastian (recovery and preservation of women's stories), and Wati Longchar (ecumenical theological educa-

tion in Asia-Pacific: visions, hopes and future directions).

This training was the result of the third regional meeting and consultation of ATL held in Bangkok in 2003 and a follow-up program of the Conference on Archives and Documentation, which was jointly organised by the International Association of Missiological Studies (IAMS) and the Catholic Association of International Missiologists (CIAM) held in Rome 2002. The training program was one of the first of its kind in the Asia-Pacific region. The purpose of the training was to equip and train librarians/archivists with the necessary skills to develop archival centres, to:

- support and to encourage the preservation of theological, missionary and church archives and documentation for the needs of the region,
- understand the theory and practice of theological, missionary and church archival work in such areas as archival management, collection development policy, acquisition, arrangement and description, research and users' services, oral history interviews and processing, and physical facilities,
- gain practical experience in the methods used by theological archivists for archival management and conservation.

Apart from gaining scientific skills on management, conservation and widening the perspectives on various issues such as historiography, ecumenical formation and resources, the training created awareness and enthusiasm among its participants to:

- collect, preserve and make available valuable materials in various forms,
- strive continuously for the improvement of cooperation and fellowship between the institutions and the individuals,
- establish and implement joint ventures—resource sharing, joint publications etc.,
- open eyes to see the real value of some

of the materials people had never cared for,

- learn what and how to collect, organize, preserve etc.,
- clear doubts, problems and have questions answered.

A participant summarised the whole training in one sentence, saying, 'It created a new super highway towards new heights.'

Sharing of hope and visions

As a part of the training program, representatives from various countries gave reports on the current situation of archives in their respective countries. As representatives of various countries shared their experiences, the kind of work they do, the nature of their collection and information about their countries, other members compared them with their own experiences and saw some similarities and differences. This helped the participants discover new ways of archive management and conservation. Some countries have well-planned, well-thought-out policies and have developed steps to follow. Some have just begun to work in the field, and others have not. All recognised that their history has affected the nature of their collections, particularly where archival collections are held. Awareness was also created among the participants to recognise the importance of preserving and conserving the oral tradition and history of tribal and original peoples.

It was noted that there is a need for more help in developing communication, information sharing in particular, and regional networking systems, particularly in the Pacific region, Cambodia and Myanmar.

Theological foundation

Six resource persons were requested to speak on the theological perspective of archive management. Rita England underlined the role and significance of archive/resource management in Asia and the Pacific. She

stressed the importance of archives as means of self-discovery and identity, and helped participants to identify how parish registers of births, marriage and deaths, gravestones, census records, academic listings, shipping lists or logs of voyages, weekly records of pay, yearbooks, historical writings, land records, minutes of meetings, letters, diaries, reports, memos, maps, film, paintings, sketches, cassettes, pamphlets, newsletters, brochures, old photographs, etc. can reveal the past in our present, and how it constantly shapes our life today, how the past in the present becomes our future. In her second lecture, Rita England focused on the archival task within Asian-Pacific resources for our churches, history, theological understanding and identity, and provided practical steps for setting up archival centres. John England led the participants to discover the wealth of materials in our own area by tracing back from the second century onwards how God has been present in the history of Asia and the Pacific. Gerald Anderson helped in understanding the Western missionary movement and the importance of resource management to tell the stories of institutions and individuals for understanding our history and for future generations. Hope Antone created awareness

by emphasising the importance of librarians and archivists in promoting the ecumenical movement, and ecumenical and ministerial formation. She also helped in discovering ecumenical resources in the regions. George Oommen helped in understanding new ways of looking at history from Asian perspective. Talking on the recovery and preservation of women's stories, Mrinalini Sebastian led the participants to be critical of existing male-dominated history and helped participants recognise the importance of women's stories and experiences in understanding the church. All those lectures provided theological foundation for archive management.

Management and conservation

Since the purpose of the training was to enhance, equip and train librarians/archivists with the necessary skills to develop archival centres, a major portion of time was allocated for this purpose. Paul Jenkins delivered five lectures: 'History of Photography and Reproduction', 'Use of Photographs in Media', 'Technical developments in Photography—Importance for Mission and Church Archivists', 'Methods of Conservation of Photos', and 'Cataloguing of Photos'. Apart from providing skills on the management

and conservation of photos, Paul created awareness on how photos can bring new light in reconstructing history and identity. In Asia and the Pacific, dances, songs, oral stories and other artistic forms play an important role in preserving and shaping history. Joseph Patmury, helped the participants to understand how a community heritage is preserved by those expressions and provided some practical methods to conserve those heritages. Aileen Hooi-Ai Khoo demonstrated practical steps and methods for collection, conservation and management of oral stories. Martha Smalley spent a week covering various aspects of technical and scientific management of archives. M.K. Bhandi helped in management of artefacts.

Study tours

Apart from lectures and practical inputs, the participants visited several places as a part of the training program. To enable the participants to see and experience archives and libraries management, the participants visited in Bangalore the United Theological College Library, the Indian Institute of Management, the Indian Institute of Science, St Peter's Pontifical Seminary Library and the Visvesvaraya Museum. —Wati Longchar

Building peace in northeast Asia

CCA general secretary Dr Ahn Jae Woong has urged the churches in northeast Asia to initiate an ecumenical peace network to streamline and strengthen the already existing peace building efforts by them.

Addressing a meeting here of the WCC member churches and national councils in northeast Asia, Ahn Jae Woong said that the EPN 'should be set up out of hope and with a forward-looking vision so that it could provide ecumenical space for building peace in northeast Asia'.

Ahn expressed the view that the nations of northeast Asia are getting ready to stand up and be noticed.

'Nations with fiercely nationalistic histories are getting tired of being directed, or

worse yet, dictated by the United States.

'They are becoming part of the new power blocs to balance the US global domination,' he said.

Quoting from WCC General Secretary Samuel Kobia's book, *The Courage to Hope*, that 'when people act out of hope, they become forward-looking; they are liberated from captivity to the past and fear of a tomorrow that is no better than yesterday', he said that promoting Korean unification and related issues in the region could be an important agenda for the EPN.

The EPN could handle the following:

- Information sharing or e-networking.
- Exchange of personnel and experts.
- Resource sharing, peace education and peace building programs.

- Occasional meeting/workshops.
- Advocacy work and lobbying.
- Joint action and solidarity networking.
- Strengthening ecumenical fellowship for peace building.

Ahn told the 20-21 August church representatives' meeting, organised prior to the WCC executive committee meeting that initiating the EPN is part of helping lessen 'one another's burden', which is an 'important ecumenical virtue and priority'.

Burdens of people in the WCC member countries are increasing, he noted. 'Help carry one another's burdens is a high moral of the ecumenical movement,' he said and added that 'it is something to do with the sharing and solidarity in our ecumenical movement in our time'.

Second Asia Conference of Theological Students

More programs for theological students, please ...

At the end of a busy five-day program, a total of 67 Asian Catholic and Protestant seminarians attending the Second Asia Conference of Theological Students in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, on 25–31 July called on churches in Asia to encourage holding more such ecumenical conferences.

They also requested that church leaders to encourage and initiate inculturation of teachings and liturgies in order to develop a truly Asian theology. In line with the wider understanding of ecumenism, they felt that leaders of mainline Protestant and Roman Catholic churches should actively build ties with Evangelical, independent and charismatic groups, even as interreligious dialogue and cooperation be continuously pursued.

Recognising that the development of China will have an impact on the rest of the world, they also called on the churches to help the ecumenical mission of Christians in China.

These recommendations were contained in a statement that was read as an act of commitment during the closing worship.

The group also had recommendations for their sending theological institutions: that the curriculum include studies on interreligious relations, inculturation and feminist theology, that they teach and encourage the use of scriptures from other faiths and of indigenous elements in liturgies and that they send more participants to ecumenical conferences by increasing financial and moral support.

They had recommendations for themselves as well: to strive to learn and know more about religions and cultures other than their own, to exercise respect for Christians of other denominations and persons of other faiths and to write reflections on ecumenism

and interfaith efforts to give greater support and publicity to such activities.

ACTS II was held to coincide with the Faith and Order Plenary Commission taking place in Kuala Lumpur from 28 July to 6 August. While the Faith and Order Commission sought to lead the global churches into theological dialogue as a means of overcoming obstacles to and opening up ways towards the manifestation of Christian unity, ACTS II sought to explore issues, trends and challenges in theology in an effort to promote a more contextualised approach to doing theology in Asia.

The program consisted of the sharing of contextual experiences by participants, synthesis and analysis of trends by Edmund Chia, inputs by Sathianathan Clarke on Christian theology and on being contextual theologians in Asia, a survey of theological methods by Robert Schreiter, a presentation on Asian feminist theologies by Hope Antone and Yong Ting Jin, inputs on Islam by Tom Michel and a sharing on ecclesiological welcome by Anne Marie Reijnen.

The group of seminarians said that many of the ecumenical ventures they know of came about due to social and political factors rather than religious or spiritual factors.

They said that most joint projects are done to address poverty, HIV/AIDS, globalisation or in response to discrimination and oppression of Christians in some Asian contexts.

They therefore called for mainstreaming the following in theological education: Asian/African contextual theologies, feminist theologies, religious pluralism and interreligious dialogue, poverty and globalisation, ecological and environmental issues and conflict management and resolution.

The program did not only begin and end with worship—each day began with worship, led by various groups of participants—bringing cultural and religious symbols and elements from various countries and traditions.

A solidarity meal was celebrated, commemorating the Passover meal and the Last Supper—but giving new meaning to such common Asian elements as tea, a sweet, a dry biscuit, sour fruit, bitter herbs and rice.

The participants joined the Faith and Order Plenary Commission at its opening worship at St Mary's Cathedral and a dinner reception at the Selangor Club on 28 July. They also sent a brief version of their statement to the commission meeting.

ACTS II was jointly organised by the Christian Conference of Asia and the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences. Of the 67 participants, 32 came from CCA member churches and related organizations while 35 came from FABC. Of these, 33 were women and 34 men.

Participants, ranging in age from 21 to 60, came from Bangladesh, China, India, Indonesia, Korea, Malaysia, Myanmar, Nepal, the Philippines, Sri Lanka, Taiwan, Thailand and Vietnam. Four overseas participants came from France, Hungary, Syria and Zambia. Among the group was a Muslim Indonesian woman who is presently doing her PhD studies in systematic theology. Her presence at this Christian conference was greatly appreciated by the participants.

Hermen Shastri, general secretary of the Council of Churches in Malaysia, gave a welcome greeting during the opening service while Ahn Jae Woong, general secretary of CCA, came later to greet the participants.

—Hope S. Antone

Sam Kobia visits CCA

Priority areas for the WCC in the coming years

Dr Samuel Kobia, general secretary of the World Council of Churches, said that overcoming violence will be an important area of work for the organisation in the coming years. At a meeting at the CCA centre in Hong Kong on 7 July he said that the Decade to Overcome Violence, proclaimed at the WCC assembly in Harare in 1998 and officially inaugurated in 2001, is one of the highest priorities for the WCC.

Sam Kobia said the next WCC general assembly in February 2006 in Porto Alegre, Brazil, would reflect more on this and provide advice and wisdom on the issue. He noted that violence is very much a part of humanity, that there is a feeling that violence is almost inevitable. There is sanctioned violence—the Christian church has even accepted just wars. There is so much violence that it is considered acceptable. ‘Should this be the case for all times and in the future?’ he asked. There is violence at the micro level,

such as in families, communities and cities, and at national and international levels. It is a complex issue, he said, then asked the question, ‘Where do we come in as a church?’

‘We are dealing with an issue that is likely to influence the lives and relationships of nations and people,’ he told the staff of the CCA, Documentation for Action Groups in Asia and the Ecumenical Coalition on Tourism.

He said that the DOV focus on Asia in 2005 would give the WCC an opportunity to work closely with CCA, and hoped that the WCC could learn more from the region about building peace and reconciliation, and peaceful and harmonious living between different faiths.

Other major issues and priority areas of the WCC, according to Sam Kobia, included:

- interreligious dialogue and cooperation with people of other faiths. Since 11 September 2001 the whole question of religion and violence has taken on a new dimension. Sam Kobia felt that it is now

important for dialogue and cooperation to go beyond the academic level, to the level where people live. He announced that the WCC is planning to hold a major international conference on interreligious dialogue in June 2005,

- ecumenical formation. The first and second generation of ecumenical leadership received ecumenical formation through well-structured bodies such as the WSCE, SCM, YMCA and YWCA. ‘Today that is not happening,’ Sam Kobia noted. Ecumenical organisations are going through difficult times. He acknowledged that the lack of leadership formation for young people is not just happening in the WCC alone, but also in many ecumenical partner organisations in the world,
- climate change. The magnitude of the problem is not taken seriously by many countries, including the USA, a country that pollutes the environment more than any other. Advocacy and a campaign for more countries to ratify the Kyoto protocol, will be major concern of the WCC.

Sam Kobia concluded his talk by pointing out that spirituality is the basis of the work of the WCC and this is what made it different from many other secular non-governmental organisations in the world.

Earlier, Kobia noted that there has always been a special relationship between the WCC and regional ecumenical organisations, and said that the WCC always had ‘good and strong relationship with the CCA’. Sam Kobia planted a tree on the CCA campus.

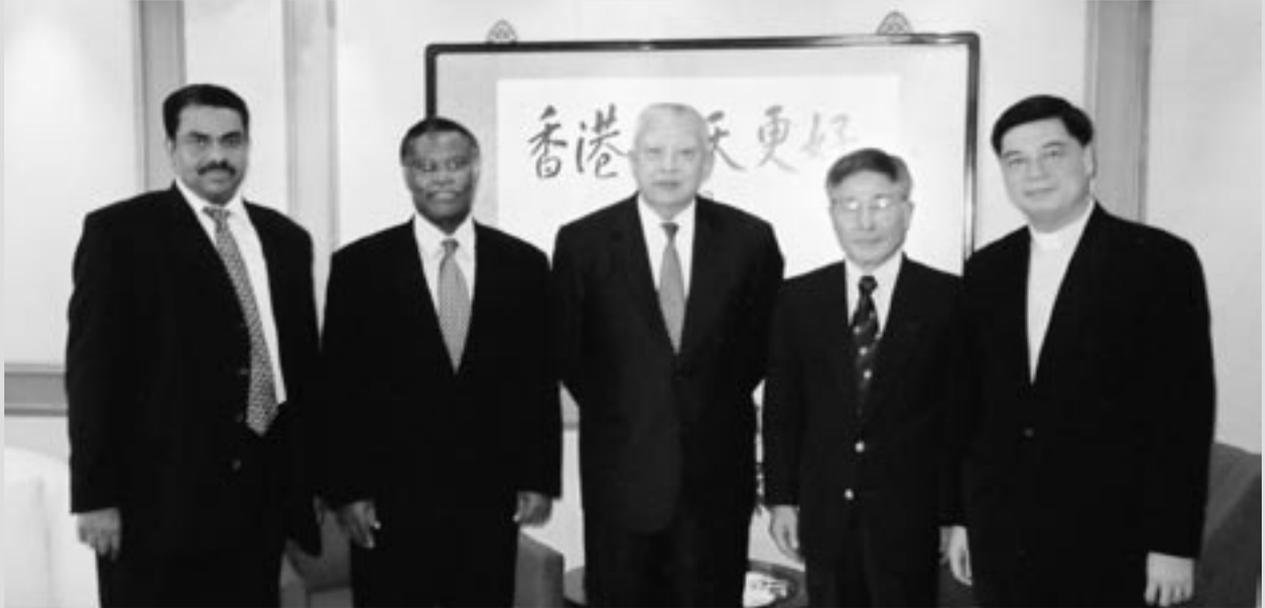
One of his last engagements in Hong Kong was a meeting with Mr Tung Chee Hwa, chief executive of the Hong Kong. Dr Ahn Jae Woong, general secretary of the CCA, Rev. Eric So, general secretary of the Hong Kong Christian Council and Dr Mathews George Chunakara, Asia secretary of the WCC, were also present.



Sam Kobia with Ahn Jae Woong, CCA general secretary

—Philip Mathew

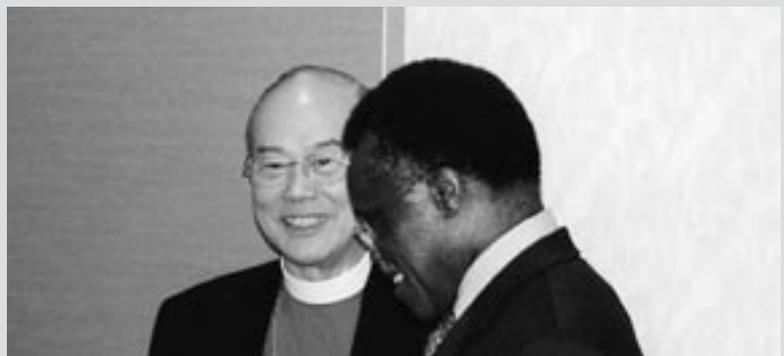
WCC general secretary in Hong Kong



Sam Kobia (second from the left) with the Hong Kong Chief Executive, Tung Chee Hwa (centre). Also present are Mathews George Chunakara (WCC), Ahn Jae Woong (CCA) and Eric So (general secretary, Hong Kong Christian Council) (photo: HKCC)



Sam Kobia at the reception in Hong Kong



Meeting with former WCC staff member David Gill (above) and Archbishop Peter Kwong (below)

Common concerns

Christian and Theravada Buddhist leaders meet

In order to enable conversation between Christians and Theravada Buddhists as people of faith with common concerns about peace, reconciliation and harmony, the World Council of Churches and the Christian Conference of Asia jointly sponsored a consultation involving the two faith groups at the Tao Fong Shan Centre, Sha Tin, Hong Kong, on 2–6 July 2004 on the theme, ‘Towards a Culture of Religious Diversity and Communal Harmony’.

A total of 35 participants, six of them women, and including nine Buddhist monks, came from Bangladesh, Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, Sri Lanka and Thailand, countries where Theravada Buddhism has been predominant. A few observers and organisers came from Japan, Switzerland, the Philippines and Hong Kong, including staff from the WCC and CCA.

Two keynote addresses were given by U Kyaw Than, Christian ecumenical leader from Myanmar, and Parichart Suwanbubha,

a Buddhist scholar from Thailand. Country groupings took turns in leading the morning devotion, some of which were attempts at interfaith prayer.

Group discussions allowed participants to share and listen to stories—good stories on one side of harmonious relations, and painful stories on the other side of tensions, antagonisms, pain and suffering among people of different religions. Among the issues of great concern were conversion, religious and ethnic identities and power, intrareligious and interreligious relations, and a possible code of conduct.

Affirming that different identities have many attachments that create barriers, the group pointed to the ‘need to transcend these identities in order to become human. Then only we will respect and honour others as human beings with different religious and ethnic identities.’ Referring to the Buddha and Jesus Christ as having transcended their narrow identities through emptying of them-

selves, the group agreed that transcending one’s identities assures the protection of different minority groups.

The group noted that interreligious relations and dialogue cannot be dissociated from relations within their own faith communities. They therefore called for a rereading of their own scriptures in the light of a religiously plural world, and to engage in intensified dialogue within their own communities as well as with other faith communities.

Knowing that conversions take place in different contexts for different reasons, the group emphasised that conversion from another religion should result from the freedom to change, not because of fear or coercion. ‘True spiritual conversion will respect the dignity and value of persons and religious traditions.’ It can take place within one’s religion as well as a journey from one religion to another. It should lead people from ignorance to wisdom, darkness to light, injustice to justice, falsehood to truth. Thus, the problem of unethical conversions need to be tackled by religious and civil societies, not by state legislature since laws on prohibitions against conversion can easily lead to abuse.

The Rev. Dr Samuel Kobia, general secretary of the World Council of Churches, was able to address the group during his visit to Asia. Speaking on ‘the spiritual dimension to promote peace and communal harmony’, he said, ‘There is in spite of all the differences an inner core common to all religions: the mystery of life, that life matters, that human beings matter, whether we are appearances of the moment or created in the image of God.’ He said that this spiritual dimension in striving for peace and communal harmony is a sign of unity between Buddhists and Christians.

Drawing from the rich tradition that goes back to Emperor Ashoka’s time 2,300 years ago, the group included in their consultation statement a code of conduct saying: In a



Concluding worship, led by Christians and Buddhists

world where religious plurality has become increasingly important, the words of Emperor Ashoka seem astonishingly modern and communicate both meaning and spirit for a culture of peace and communal and religious harmony: 'One should not honour only one's own religion and condemn the religions of others, but should honour others' religions for this or that reason. So doing, one helps one's own religion to grow and renders service to the religions of others too. In acting otherwise one digs the grave of one's own religion and also does harm to other religions. Whosoever honours his own religion and condemns other religions does so indeed through devotion to his own religion, thinking, "I will glorify my own religion." But on the contrary, in so doing he injures his own religion more gravely. So concord is good: Let all listen, and be willing to listen to the doctrines professed by others.' (Rock Edict 12)

In line with the Rock Edict, we propose the following to create a culture of religious diversity and communal and religious harmony:

- Share the same purpose of mutual spir-



Sam Kobia speaking at the Christian-Buddhist consultation

itual development for the transformation of individuals and communities.

- Make the agenda clear, without any hidden agendas.
- Be mindful in sharing in a responsible and ethical manner.
- Have trust, honesty, openness to engage in dialogue with a self-critical mind.
- Have moral imperatives—do good to

others, if you want others to do good to you.

- Learn in depth the core of your religion.
- Engage in democratic and humane relations.
- Engage in social dialogue which leads into action—to work for peace, reconciliation and justice.

—Hope S. Antone



Tao Fong Shan Christian Centre

Asia Ecumenical Academy

21 participants for 21 days for the 21st century

In August 2004 the Asia Ecumenical Academy met around the theme 'Ecumenical Formation for Mission'. Over three intensive weeks together—listening to lectures, debating in small groups, writing and presenting papers, and gaining exposure to the Thai situation—the academy was organised around three subthemes: 'Ecumenism in the 21st Century', 'Globalisation' and 'Many Faiths, Many Cultures'.

We came from eleven countries around the Asia-Pacific region. Each of us had been nominated by a CCA member church, NCC or partner organisation and selected by the organisers of the academy. Over the course of the event, although we were mostly total strangers at the beginning, we began to vigorously express our common identity and a strong ecumenical vision. In this way CCA continues to build the ecumenical movement across Asia.

The setting of Crystal Spring House in Chiang Mai, Thailand, made for an engaging and relaxing environment. Each day began and ended with worship, and we each brought a symbol of our home church community. The educational methodology was through lectures, discussion, exposure visits, small groups, personal reading and reflection, writing papers and giving presentations. There was much intense listening as we learned to understand each others' accents in the English language. Key input was provided by Dr Preman Niles, Dr Ahn Jae Woong and Fr Thomas Michel.

Exposure visits included the Church of Christ in Thailand AIDS ministry, the New Life Centre (female tribal children and women trafficking), a joint government project on sustainable agriculture and a Mahayana Buddhist monastery where we met with the abbot. Out of these experiences participants were encouraged to reflect and respond to situations of need and prejudice in their own communities in their home countries.



Participants at the Asia Ecumenical Academy held in Chiang Mai, Thailand



Dr Preman Niles, dean of AEA, makes a point at the academy

When I came to the Academy, I wasn't sure what to expect. I had never been to anything like this before, but I wanted to learn more about the ecumenical movement to strengthen the work I am doing at home.
—Casthelia Kartika (Indonesia)

This was my first ecumenical program. Through this program I came to know many things about ecumenism. I was satisfied with all the program arrangements. Through this AEA program I can start ecumenical work and continue my journey.
—Thimkhup Buiting (Bangladesh)

Through CCA-AEA I came to know about many new things, which I never learned and even never experienced before. My heart is full of happiness to share the things I learned and also my heart is full of thanks for the efforts of CCA to make this conference possible.
—Riaz Mubarak (Pakistan)

Dr Preman Niles was wonderful as our dean. I am really grateful to CCA

for organising the Asia Ecumenical Academy and making it possible for me to attend. I learnt so much and have so many new ideas.
—Nadarajah Gnanaponrajah (Sri Lanka)

It was good to have most of the evenings without organised events. It meant we had time to reflect and read, get to know each other and talk about what we had seen and learnt from the lectures and other input, and to hear about each other's situations. Eating meals together and going to the markets together were also important community times!
—Milanie Catolico (Philippines)

We discovered that ecumenism is going through change, just as the churches in our home countries are. Dr Niles emphasised that it is time to trust the younger generation with the gift handed on to it. To paraphrase him, none of us begins and ends the journey. We all pick up where someone else left off and leave off where

someone else carries it on.
—John Henderson (Australia)

The AEA was very good. It was a challenging and fruitful meeting with people who come from many cultures. Even though I am not a Christian the members accepted me as their community. Encouragement is the most impressive element in this group. I am happy to attend this.
—Taku Kumakiri (Japan)

The food was excellent, and the lectures were insightful. I learnt many new things about the ecumenical movement. My understanding of Islam changed a lot. This learning experience has made a tremendous change in my attitude towards Islam.
—Solomon Rongpi (India)

Before I came to this program I wondered whether I would fit into it. I found market shopping and the zoo interesting besides the lectures and discussions. As I reflect I enjoyed it all.
—Yahya Tirta Prewita (Indonesia)

In the first week the studies grappled with the meaning of the term 'ecumenical', and the history of ecumenism in Asia. Ecumenism was studied in the context of overcoming barriers, breaking out of limitations imposed from the outside, and the difficulty of defining it as a movement.

Participants were left at the end of the first week feeling the limitless possibilities of the ecumenical space— space for the kingdom, space for insight, and space for growth. In other words, space for God and for others. They were also aware of the need to re-examine our symbols and recover many Asian symbols that have been discarded or denied in the missionary years. Quite a lot had been said about the theological dimension of ecumenism—a living theology that celebrates the integrity of Creation, and a searching for the oneness of the body of Christ. There were also some preliminary comments about making space for others—particularly in

relation to gender awareness and interfaith dialogues. During the second week the scene intensified with an examination of globalisation, and its tendency to reduce space for human and ecumenical activity. Under the guise of oneness it can instead create separation and division within societies. A distinction was made between globalisation as a process and as a project. It is the second that has ill effects and results in a new form of colonialism and domination. Painful stories of the impact of this were shared by a number of participants, particularly from the Philippines and Sri Lanka. We were all challenged to consider the impact on our Christian hope as our societies feel the effects of 'free trade' and globalisation.

In the third week our attention turned to the people of God among the people of the nations. There was a special presentation on Islam, and the exposure visit took us to a Buddhist monastery. Participants found their

preconceptions challenged, and learned a great deal about each other's situations as Christian minorities in their home countries. Participants shared the struggle of understanding and critically evaluating the Western model that has shaped our experience of the Christian faith. What does an authentic Asian Christianity look like, and how is it to be interpreted in our home situations? How do we avoid labels such as 'syncretism' and 'pluralist'? These sessions were very stimulating and an excellent way to send us back into our home situations.

A warm thank you from all participants to CCA for running the Academy, for ICCO for supporting it, and especially to Corazon Tabing-Reyes for being our coordinator and organiser, and guiding us safely to and from the meeting.

—Margaret Kalaiselvi Larbeer (India),
Sam Koshy Thalathayil (India)
and John Henderson (Australia)

Cooperation to fight a pandemic

HIV/AIDS training workshop in China

The HIV and AIDS Training Workshop for Church Leaders in China was jointly organised by three organizations—the Christian Conference of Asia – Mekong Ecumenical Partnership Program (CCA–MEPP), the Amity Foundation and the Church of Christ in Thailand – AIDS Ministry (CAM)—on 21–24 June 2004 at the Seagull Hotel, Kunming, the capital of Yunnan of China.

Forty-five church leaders attended. Dr Prawate Khid-arn (CCA), Dr Wang Yun-shen (deputy director, Office of Yunnan Provincial Working Committee for HIV/AIDS Control) and Miss Elija Fung (St John's Cathedral HIV Education Centre, Hong Kong) facilitated the program, which was designed to reinforce participants' theological and theoretical knowledge and practical skills in HIV and AIDS concerned ministry.

Mr Jiang Zhu Lin, vice-chairman of Yunnan Committee of the Three-self Movement of the Protestant churches gave an opening meditation emphasising that the church is the salt of the world (Matthew 5:13). This was followed by welcoming remarks from CCA, the Amity Foundation and the office of Religious Affairs of Yunnan.

Prawate delivered a keynote presentation on 'Religion and AIDS' emphasising two agendas—the role of religion and what churches can do in combating HIV and AIDS. He challenged that 'there are two ways to cure the disease—to search for effective medicine and to stop the pandemic. Medicine can cure a disease, but a good lifestyle and behaviour can save a whole life and the whole of society. Churches and faith-based organisations are challenged to follow in the footsteps of the Lord, who stood with people who were marginalised and stigmatised, who

healed not only physical ailments but also understood and healed the deep scars and wounds inflicted by society, who wept and empathised with human suffering.'

Dr Wang Yunshen overviewed the situation in China, highlighting that China is among those countries in which the number of people living with HIV/AIDS has been increasing rapidly. Currently there are about 800,000 HIV-positive people in China.

There are four major modes of infection—injecting drug use, blood products and transfusions, prostitution and homosexual activity, and from mother to child. With a hundred million people or more on the move as the country's economy improves, China's large-scale migration carries with it the risk of contributing to the development of an HIV epidemic.

Combating HIV/AIDS in China, most organisations and groups, including churches, are actively running preventive programs—producing posters, pamphlets, brochures, handbooks etc. Centres for counselling are gradually being set up. However there is not enough basic information about HIV and AIDS available for the general public, especially in rural communities.

The resource persons from Thailand facilitated discussions emphasising a two-way communication method: (1) knowing HIV and AIDS and how to control it, and (2) pastoral care in HIV and AIDS crises.

Rev. Sanan Wutti of CAM, speaking from a pastoral care perspective, elaborated on understanding HIV and AIDS. He emphasised that although there is not yet a medicine or vaccine that can permanently cure the HIV virus, we can stop it from being a pandemic. In the meantime people living with HIV and AIDS can live longer if they do not receive

additional HIV viruses, carefully keeping healthy and preventing opportunistic infections.

Rev. Somnuk Jaripen of the CCT Pastoral Care Unit brought HIV and AIDS issues in the mainstream of church's ministry and mandate. HIV and AIDS, like other problems, becomes a theological and ethical challenge to churches. The causes of HIV and AIDS are also rooted in lifestyle, social perspectives, social attitudes and individual practices. Fighting against HIV and AIDS should be fought with a strong religious faith and commitment. Jesus' example as a counsellor guides those who show sensitively concern and care, carefully listen, understand the strengths and weaknesses of clients, and help them to find their own answers. (See Luke 24:13–35.)

Two case studies were presented to provide a practical approach and how churches might implement a fight against HIV and AIDS. Miss Elija Fung shared the experience of St John's Cathedral HIV Education Centre in Hong Kong. Many activities have been introduced to raise awareness of churches and public communities in Hong Kong. Rev. Sanan shared CAM's mission, vision and approaches for churches and communities in dealing with HIV and AIDS issues.

Participants were divided into six county groups to discuss two questions: What are they going to do after they return back to their respective communities? What assistance/support is needed? Participants also had a chance to express a personal commitment on what they are going to do in the next six months.

The commitment included the following:

- Survey and study HIV and AIDS situation in churches and communities.

- Share knowledge and experience to congregations.
- Conduct public education programs and campaigns.
- Provide counselling to people living with HIV and AIDS and their family members.
- Organise Bible studies reflecting HIV and AIDS concerns.
- Coordinate with local government offices, hospitals and clinics.
- Organize preventive and care training for church members.
- Set up visiting teams and volunteers.
- Set up HIV/AIDS funds.
- Strengthen networking with other churches, local government units and others.
- Set up AIDS and drug education centres, etc.

In response to seriousness of the issue

and needs of churches in combating HIV and AIDS, the joint organising partners' team came out with practical recommendations.

- Organise an intensive training of trainers (ITOT). It is proposed that about three to five potential pastors and leaders from each county will be selected for this intensive training.
- Facilitate a bilateral personal exchange between China and Thailand. It is proposed that six HIV/AIDS coordinators of churches in Yunnan will visit AIDS projects in Thailand in November/December 2004 and vice versa.
- Formulate a three-year HIV/AIDS annual training. It is proposed that a three-year joint training program for church leaders/villagers will be designed. The pro-

gram will target the counties that face the most serious HIV/AIDS issues, Hong He, De Hong and Da Li. Together with resource persons from the CCT, coordinators of each county will facilitate the program.

Mr Songkiat Tung-yen of CCA-MEPP and Mr. He Chong Pei of the Amity Foundation thanked the partners and participants for their active participation in the workshop.

Mr Jian Zhu Lin then extended closing remarks. He emphasised that the program is a great contribution and another milestone of the cooperation between CCA, the Amity Foundation and the Church of Christ in Thailand and the churches in Yunnan, and looked forward for further and closer cooperation in the coming years.

—Prawate Khid-arn

Global currents

Compassion for North Korea

The World Council of Churches has appealed to the international community to help lift sanctions against the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) and restore humanitarian aid and assistance to overcome hunger and malnutrition in the country. 'The grave humanitarian crisis of hunger, chronic malnutrition and related disease facing the North Korean people are a challenge not only to the churches, but also to the conscience of the entire international community,' the WCC executive committee, meeting in Seoul, in South Korea, said in a statement.

Acknowledging that the churches and related agencies have addressed these problems and helped prevent 'a major catastrophe', the 24–27 August executive committee urged them to continue to deal with the humanitarian needs of the North Korean people. The WCC executive committee, which was meeting in Asia for the first time, called on churches in Korea and outside to mobilise support to the multilateral process of the six-

party talks, started in August 2003 and now in the third round. 'This initiative provides a sign of hope,' the statement said. It noted that the parties involved in the six-party talks, comprising South Korea, North Korea, Russia, Japan, China and the USA, 'have agreed to work towards a nuclear-free Korean peninsula and most share the view that North Korea's concern over its security must be given due consideration and resolved.'

The WCC statement on Korea mentions the 'pioneering role' the Korean churches and the WCC have played in promoting discussions on the peaceful reunification of the Korean peninsula. An international conference at the Japanese city of Tozanso in 1984 is cited as 'an effective framework', which provided an opportunity for church leaders from North and South Korea to come together for sharing concerns for peace and reconciliation, and for prayer and worship. The Churches Commission on International Affairs decided in May 2004 to focus on peace and reunification of the Korean peninsula till

the next WCC assembly, to be held in Brazil in 2006, according to the statement.

The church body expressed concern over reports of human rights violations in the DPRK and denial of access to international human rights organisations. 'The promotion and protection of human rights and human dignity are an integral part of the mission of the churches,' the statement said. It urged the USA 'not to take pre-emptive military action against the DPRK' or use nuclear weapons against it.

The statement also expressed solidarity and appreciation for the 'courageous witness and leadership' of the National Council of Churches in Korea (NCCCK) and its member churches and upheld the sovereignty of the Korean people and their determination for the future.

The executive committee meeting, hosted by the NCCCK, reviewed the various programs of the WCC and administrative matters. The members also visited the member churches of the WCC in Korea.

Faith and Order

CCA general secretary calls for a people-centred ecumenism

Photo: WCC/Manuel Lopez



Ahn Jae Woong, general secretary of the Christian Conference of Asia, called for a seeking of the true meaning of ecumenism in the context of non-Christian and non-ecumenical realities in the world.

Speaking on the first day of the World Council of Churches' Faith and Order Plenary Commission in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, Ahn Jae Woong said that the 'ecumenical movement should capture a frontier spirit in exploring God's plans in the whole of God's creation'. He said that 'moving away from the people or people's movements' was one of the weaknesses of the ecumenical movement, and suggested working towards an Asian people's 'Pax Asiana' as a way to revitalise people-centred ecumenism. Building a people's Pax Asiana, by gathering Asian people's wisdom, traditions, customs and experience, is an ecumenical task in Asia, which has a rich tradition of respect for life and for communitarian and egalitarian life.

He recommended the Buddhist way of the Sangha as an option for building a people's Pax Asiana. He described the Sangha as a spiritual community where all members shared their understanding of life and sta-

bility of community, shared their sorrows and joys and all were connected with each other.

People's struggle against racism, classism, sexism, militarism and all kinds of discrimination and domination should be the constant ecumenical task of

all peace-loving people for building peace in the world, the CCA general secretary told the 28 July – 6 August plenary.

He urged the participants to work together with people of other faiths and no faiths and civil society groups to achieve peace with justice. He termed peace not only as 'the absence of war or conflicts, but also shalom, righteousness or wholeness and liberation or salvation. The awareness of violence, non-violence and the struggle of justice are the ultimate biblical teachings for generation after generation. Without resolving the tension, hatred and hostilities in human hearts and minds, any attempt for peace making efforts will be futile,' he noted.

He wanted the participants to go through Metanoia, for becoming new beings and children of God so as to become peacemakers in this world. 'Peacemaking is God's ordained ecumenical task,' Ahn told the commission's first meeting in the 21st century.

Earlier, welcoming more than 150 participants from different parts of the world, the ecumenical leader said that poverty, diversity, religiosity and lack of dignity and security were some of the characteristics of the region. He also mentioned degradation of

environment as a serious threat for the people. Dr Ahn expressed the view that religious teachings and Christian life are important for achieving people's aspiration in Asia. He called on the Faith and Order Commission to offer new theological framework for fullness of life for building communities of peace for all.

Referring to Asian churches, Ahn Jae Woong said that even though many of them have cooperated with the colonial powers and authoritarian governments in the past, there are also churches in different countries that have deeply associated with independent and democratic movements.

He referred to Asian theologians articulating their contextual theologies, such as Minjung theology in Korea, homeland theology in Taiwan, people's struggle theology in the Philippines, water buffalo theology in Thailand, Dalit theology in India, and Buraku liberation theology in Japan.

He cited the Church of South India, the Church of North India and the Church of Christ in Thailand as examples of churches who have demonstrated church unity in the region. He also mentioned the China Christian Council, which is postdenominational, and the Uniting Church in Australia, which is inclusive and open as far as receiving new members are concerned. 'Asian churches as a whole may be able to contribute to the rest of the world the experiences of the churches of the united, uniting and postdenominational within the framework of the Faith and Order Commission,' he added.

Rev. Dr Samuel Kobia, general secretary of the WCC and Rev. Dr David K. Yemba, moderator of the Faith and Order Commission, also addressed the plenary.

Among the several objectives of the WCC's Faith and Order Commission, considered to be the most representative theological forum in the world, is the promotion of the visible unity of the Christian church.

Mission, youth and globalisation

Young people call for mission strategies to counter globalisation's negative impact



Twenty-five young people from various churches and youth organisations in Africa, Asia, Europe and North and South America participated in a seminar on mission and youth in the context of globalisation at the Ecumenical Institute at Bossey, Switzerland, on 17–23 August.

Through worship, community building activities, creative and participatory Bible studies, small group discussions, sharing of experiences, analysis of realities and issues and cultural art forms, the group reflected on the role of young people and the church in carrying out mission in today's challenging context. Apart from the economic and political aspects of globalisation, the young people acknowledged how cultural aspects are seriously influencing them today so that they have 'consciously and unconsciously become its agents'.

'Globalisation imposes a culture of domination characterised by loss of identity and

languages, spiritual oppression, loss of community life, erosion of Christian values and alienation. It systematically uses mass media, educational institutions and at times even the church and its organisations to propagate and justify its destructive and exploitative logic,' the group statement reads.

The group however affirmed that globalisation does not have the last word. 'More and more young people are becoming aware and are challenged to affirm their Christian faith through finding innovative alternatives and strategies in education and advocacy' to counter the negative impact of globalisation.

'As young people, we understand mission today as the announcement and realisation of the fullness of life for all, which is the message of the Word of God,' they said. This is done through witnessing and action, both within the church and the wider society. Mission is also faith in action, they affirmed, 'where "we should walk the talk" if we are

to be true to our calling'.

The group statement, entitled 'Called to be Healers and Peacemakers Now!', includes a message to the World Council of Churches' Conference on World Mission and Evangelism. It urges the conference to seriously consider the context of globalisation today as something that calls for more relevant and innovative mission efforts, and to enable the full participation of young people in all processes.

Hope Antone of the Faith, Mission and Unity program area of CCA was invited by Elizabeth Tapia (on the faculty of Bossey and in charge of the seminar) as one of the Bible study leaders and cofacilitator with Andreas Nufer (Switzerland). Others who made some input at the seminar were Martin Robra, Kwame Labi and Freddy Knutsen (all of WCC), Tamara Walker (Methodist Church, USA), and Lei Garcia (youth artist from the Philippines).

—Hope S. Antone



Access for all

Statement of commitment by religious leaders at the 15th International AIDS Conference

The tragic toll of the HIV and AIDS pandemic, as well as its continuous and rapid spread in most parts of the world, brings compelling urgency to the call for new commitment by people of faith to the goal of 'access for all'.

The HIV and AIDS crisis is bringing us together because we are all living with HIV and AIDS. We need to share knowledge, understanding and experience from our various religious communities so that our efforts become more and more effective and inclusive. Through this, we will seek to establish a new culture of interfaith cooperation, respecting the uniqueness within our traditions while focusing on our shared values of human dignity and human rights.

Have religious communities done enough to respond to the urgent challenges posed by HIV and AIDS to individuals, communities, and the global human family?

No! As leaders in religious communities, assembled for the 15th International AIDS Conference, in Bangkok, on 11–16 July 2004, we acknowledge with much regret that quite often our response has been one of prejudice, ignorance, fear and judgmental attitudes.

We are determined to work together and within our communities to:

- promote the dignity, equality, and rights of all people,
- discuss openly and accurately the basic facts about HIV and AIDS and about all effective means of prevention,
- work to eliminate the root causes of the HIV and AIDS pandemic, including gender inequality, prejudice against those whose way of life or sexual orientation is different from the majority community, systemic injustice and unequal distribution of wealth,
- overcome silence, stigma, discrimination, denial and fear regarding HIV and AIDS,
- reject the negative statements by some

faith leaders that AIDS is a form of divine punishment or retribution,

- advocate for expanded resources to fight against HIV and AIDS,
- document 'good practices' and support research to identify more effective means of prevention and treatment,
- attain 'access for all'—to effective preventive education and knowledge, comprehensive care and treatment and full inclusion in the community.

Our religious communities bring rich experience and unique strengths to fulfil these commitments. Specifically, we will carry out the following actions:

- We will implement policies within our structures and institutions in order to combat every tendency to marginalise people living with or affected by HIV and AIDS as either employees or members within our communities.
- We will advocate for and with people living with or affected by HIV and AIDS in order to obtain lower prices for both medications and laboratory tests and to ensure access to the full range of education, counselling, voluntary testing and care.
- We will call upon those holding political office, in collaboration with all members of the global human family, to fulfil the grave responsibility to make the dream of 'access for all' into an everyday reality in all parts of the world, among all groups of people and at every level of the socioeconomic spectrum and to maintain strict, enhanced and transparent accountability in this regard.
- We will ensure, through educational activities and community gatherings, the inclusion of accurate information about ways to prevent the further spread of HIV.
- We will commit our diverse structures of health care, ranging from highly special-

ised services to locally based village clinics, as well as our systems of education, social and community development, to implement these strategies in a comprehensive, universal and equitable manner.

- We will dedicate additional funds from the resources of our own religious communities in order to scale up our respective contributions to the struggle against the HIV pandemic and pledge careful stewardship and responsible use of the funds entrusted us by donors from our own communities and from the international community.
- We will involve people living with or directly affected by HIV, many of whom are members of our own religious communities, in the response to this pandemic.
- We will give priority attention addressing the practices within our religious traditions that increase the vulnerability of women and girls who also carry the greatest burden of response in this pandemic.
- We will promote community-based responses to the special needs of children orphaned and made vulnerable by HIV and AIDS.
- We will promote preaching and teaching about HIV in our houses of worship and will encourage the designation of special days and/or weeks of prayer and other religious observances to focus on HIV and AIDS.
- We commit ourselves to monitor and evaluate our own progress toward accomplishing the goals that we have articulated in this statement.

HIV and AIDS knows no boundaries. All of our religious communities are living with HIV and AIDS, and yet a common thread in our beliefs is hope inspired by faith. We will not rest until the promise of 'access for all' and the hope of a world without HIV and AIDS is fulfilled.

‘Building Communities of Peace for All’

The theme of CCA’s 12th General Assembly and the DOV Focus on Asia in 2005

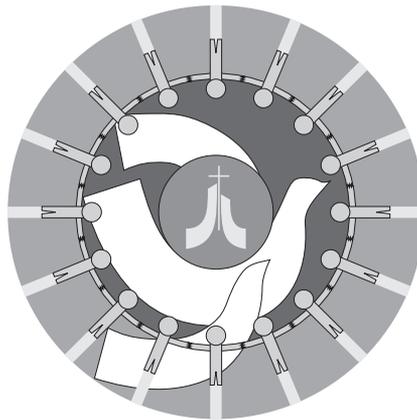
After a five-year focus on ‘A Time for Fullness of Life for All’ (2000–2005), the Christian Conference of Asia begins another five-year focus (2005–2010) on ‘Building Communities of Peace for All’, starting at the 12th General Assembly on 31 March – 6 April 2005.

The sharing of the good news of God’s will for *fullness of life for all* will certainly continue to be at the core of the life and ministry of the Christian Conference of Asia. But the theme ‘Building Communities of Peace for All’ reflects a call and commitment to a task and a vision in the context of Asia’s religious and ethnic diversity and ongoing quest for communal harmony. Hence, living in Asia can no longer be romantically conceived of as becoming one community but living together as many diverse communities that are held together by the same vision of peace for all.

Biblical-theological bases of the theme

The theme, ‘Building Communities of Peace For All’, was suggested by the present general secretary, Dr Ahn Jae Woong, and is inspired by a portion of Mark 9:50b: ‘Have salt in yourselves, and *be at peace with each other*’. The verse is part of the conclusion of a series of sayings attributed to Jesus. These concluding verses (49–50) speak of a warning about being *salted with fire* and of salt losing its saltiness. Being salted with fire seems to describe the state of trial and persecution in the time of the gospel writer’s (Mark’s) community. As some Bible commentators have said, both salt and fire are images for preserving food. Trials and persecution were seen as ways through which a people’s integrity or faith was tested as well

as preserved. Christ’s disciples were not expected to run away from trials or testing but to let their integrity and faith shine through despite the trials.



The image of salt brings to mind other sayings of Jesus found in the other gospels:

- You are the salt of the earth, but if salt has lost its taste, how can its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything, but is thrown out and trampled under foot. (Matthew 5:13)
- Salt is good; but if salt has lost its taste, how can its saltiness be restored? It is fit neither for the soil nor for the manure pile; they throw it away. (Luke 14:34–35)

There is definitely a warning of judgment in such sayings, which are meant for the disciples or followers of Christ Jesus.

Can salt really lose its saltiness, its chemical properties, or its value? Salt (*balas* in Greek) is often taken to mean sodium chloride, a condiment to add flavour to food, or which serves as purifier or preservative. But

the concept of ‘salt of the earth’ (or salt of the soil) in Matthew 5:13 could also refer to a salt-like material like potash or phosphate, which was in abundance in and around the Dead Sea area of Palestine. Such material was used for fertilising the land and enriching manure pile, which was then spread on the land¹. Seen in this light, it is not so much the taste of saltiness of the ‘salt of the earth’ that is lost but rather the strength or potency in its nourishing the soil.

‘*Have salt in yourselves*’ therefore can mean ‘have strength among yourselves so you can help to nourish the earth’. It is interesting to note that the strength of the salt is made effective in its immersion or diffusion in soil. The strength of the salt is not made effective in its being set apart—not even as a kind of purifier or additive stabiliser that is simply added to something. Thus, disciples of Christ Jesus are called not simply to be preservers of whatever is good in society. Neither are they called to be merely agreeable folk who simply add flavour to an otherwise immoral society. Rather, they are called to become a life-bringing force, through being intertwined with other elements in the soil and helping to provide nourishment to an otherwise sterile society.

Another way of understanding ‘have salt in yourselves’ is to consider the place of salt in sacrificial offering (Leviticus 2:13) and in mealtable sharing (Ezra 4:14). Salt, which was to be found in every sacrifice, symbolised preservation from corruption. The Old Testament phrase ‘salt of the covenant with your God’ brings to mind how covenants in those days were sealed and confirmed by a formal meal in which the parties partook of salt together, thereby concluding the pact. In covenant making, the addition of salt was a

deliberate act that made the covenant relationship eternal and binding. The practice of eating salt with someone was a sign of friendship and loyalty. Viewed together, the ‘salt of the covenant’ may be understood in the context of exhortation to hospitality and covenant loyalty.

Still another way of understanding salt is through its quality of collectivity and community. Thus, ‘Have salt in yourselves, and *be at peace with each other*’ means ‘stick together and be at peace with each other so that you may maintain your saltiness’.² Sticking together means solidarity, which is made possible through compassion, and which can bring out the essence of salt in the faith community.

Apart from the linguistic context of the verses supporting our theme, it is also important to situate it in the larger context of the surrounding passages. These verses actually follow a series of sayings about stumbling blocks that disciples put before the ‘little ones’ of Christ. Interestingly, such sayings about stumbling blocks follow a short narrative about an ‘outsider’ who was casting out demons in Jesus’ name and who the disciples (through John) had tried to stop because he was ‘not following (read as ‘not part of’) them’. This little narrative is a reminder that the task of salting or fertilising the earth is not necessarily a monopoly of the disciples then, or of the church of today.

Seen in this context, ‘Have salt in yourselves, and be at peace with one another’ means ‘there is strength in cooperation and collaboration; peace, reconciliation, and solidarity will happen when you work together’. And so *building communities of peace for all* is truly a call to a task, commitment and vision for all.

The General Assembly focus

As the theme of the next five years, ‘Building Communities of Peace for All’ highlights CCA’s ongoing commitment to a wider ecumenism—which includes fostering better intrafaith relations, interfaith cooperation, collaboration with civil society on peace and justice issues, and concern for the integrity of all creation.

Why does CCA speak of communities rather than community? What is the inclusive

community that we aspire to have in Asia?

I think it would never be a single or uniform community, or with any one dominant group swallowing or embracing all other groups. Rather, it would be a community of distinct communities whose diverse races, colours, cultures, languages and religions would be valued and celebrated as part of the wellspring of our cultural heritages and spiritual resources. Difference and diversity would no longer be seen as reasons of or used as cover-up for animosities and hostilities between groups of people. Instead, these would be the starting points for real and meaningful dialogue between various groups as each begins to value and respect the other. In this spirit of celebrating diversity, we Asian Christians would no longer see the other as mortal enemy, or as the unsaved doomed for hell, or as the poor heathen to convert. We would instead look at them as brothers, sisters, partners whom God also loves, to whom God has also revealed truths, from whom we can learn about life, living and relating, and in whom we can also find the image of God. Furthermore, an inclusive community of communities in Asia would be a community that works together, with and despite all other differences, towards a more just and peaceful Asia. Together, we would draw some strength and build our solidarity using our diverse cultural and spiritual resources for the sake of wholeness and fullness of life for all.³

The theme reflects Asia’s particular reality of diversity—where we can no longer think of uniformity but of pluriformity. Hence, we think in terms of many communities rather than one, yet bound or linked together with the vision of peace for all. The word ‘building’ reminds us that action is still needed by these communities *and* for these communities of peace to truly come about.

The DOV Focus on Asia

The 12th General Assembly theme of the Christian Conference of Asia is also the theme of the DOV (Decade to Overcome Violence) Focus on Asia in 2005. When the World Council of Churches, which initiated the DOV, decided to have the 2005 Focus on Asia, CCA staff felt that the theme ‘Building Communities of Peace for All’ also falls under

the overall DOV theme, ‘Churches Seeking Reconciliation and Peace’, but with a clearly Asian slant.

In such a vast and plural continent as Asia, the quest for reconciliation and peace is in the midst of various forms of violence—from physical, structural, to personal, interpersonal, communal and subtle forms. The common forms of violence that cut across subregions in Asia include the following: economic globalisation, religious fundamentalism, ethnic conflicts, massive poverty, injustice and corruption, militarisation, human rights violations, discrimination, and gender injustice, to name a few.

In the DOV Focus on Asia, we will need to highlight churches’ participation in violence, which takes various forms—in theology or doctrines that legitimise violence, in silence or passive stance in the face of violence, or in outright alliance with the powers-that-be.

More than narrating a list of situations of violence, we would also make this mid-decade focus a time to celebrate efforts in peace building that have been going on in Asia. These may be efforts with or without the label of DOV, initiated within or without the church and the ecumenical movement, but which contribute to the building of communities of peace for all in the region. For the task of peace building is not the monopoly of the church or the ecumenical movement. Indeed it challenges the church and the ecumenical movement to widen its circle of friends and partners, remembering its wide-open call and task: ‘Have salt in yourselves, and be at peace with one another.’

—Hope S. Antone

1. This idea was shared by Martyn Percy of the Lincoln Theological Institute in the University of Manchester, UK, with a discussion group at a WCC consultation on ‘Interrogating and Redefining Power’ in Cret Berard, Switzerland, December 2003.
2. This was shared by Preman Niles, former general secretary of the Council for World Mission, during a Bible study session he led at the CCA General Committee meeting in Bangkok, Thailand, in October 2003.
3. Hope S. Antone in a Bible study for the CCA workshops on worship and curriculum in Christian Education on 20–27 October 1999 in Bali, Indonesia.

simply because the alternative may simply be poverty or hunger. It is the narrative of people deceived by drugs, gambling and unconscionable consumerism, of unrestrained and ruthless competition and of the eventual sense of powerlessness of its victims. It is the venal displacement of farmers, fisher folk and indigenous persons making way for the arrival of a tourist enterprise in the form of a five-star hotel, a golf course or a new amusement park. In addition it is always the overworked, underpaid workers in the organised and unorganised tourist industry sectors.

Tourism, as we have come to know it, unfailingly reinforces sexist and imperialistic stereotypes.

Christians must be conscious of God's affirmation that we are all made in the image of God. Not one of the features of tourism just described would conform to this affirmation. To recreate humankind in the image of God is an invitation to engage in restoring the brokenness of people and communities caused by the recklessness of tourism.

This, in turn, is the unambiguous call to intervene to restore God's justice to the victim and to transform tourism into a vocation centred on justice and human values. The sole motive of profit accumulation must be discarded and must give way to a value-based enterprise where the benefits of tourism are equitably shared between the various parts of the tourism equation—the tourist, the entrepreneur and the host communities. This alone will reverse a trend whereby the hosts and their abodes are reduced to being commodities and objectified for the hedonistic pleasures of the traveller.

A new paradigm of tourism is, above all, the quest for a form of spirituality that acquires the traits of a pilgrimage. A pilgrim goes off in search of God and in the pursuit of truth. God's truth cannot be found outside the ambit of justice and true community. In a world torn asunder by economic divisions, a traveller can make the choice, or be encouraged to choose, to go out in search of people-to-people encounters, in which each discover the other, understand each other and share with each other what they can and have. This is a pilgrim pathway that can lead to mutuality, solidarity and a real discovery of

human community. It will be the trail to the cessation of abuses of the previous ways of exploitation rooted in greed. It will symbolise the abandonment of the search for profit alone and, instead, instil stewardship values of God's world of people, mountains, seas, islands, air, birds and trees—indeed all of God's precious creation.

ECOT is a community of faith and views tourism as a spiritual question. Leisure tourism is like all things of God—spiritual. It exists to serve God. And leisure can either be for self-aggrandisement or to advance something meaningful in a person's values in life in addition to self-regeneration. When the right relationship is established between self-fulfilment and social responsibility in tourism, then tourism will be an act of pilgrimage in the service of people and nature.

Pilgrims are not mere tourists. Pilgrims tread sensitively on holy ground whereas tourists tend to trample over a sacred space. Pilgrims respect their hosts and accept their ways, indeed even try to learn from them while offering to share their own ways. Tourists too often see the ways of their hosts as a commodity, reserved for display at the 'evening show'! Pilgrims are humble and patient, waiting for the time to do things, for the hosts to be ready too. Tourists are in a hurry, hasty, even arrogant.

'The person on horseback knows nothing of the toil of the traveller on foot.' So goes an ancient Chinese proverb. To travel through God's world is to join the pilgrimage to discover the truth about God's creation—Gods' people and their cultures and God's nature. And where is the truth to be found in our world today? Truth lies in the ashes of injustice, degradation, disempowerment, decay and hopelessness. Third World tourism, in particular, has managed to dodge these questions. This pilgrimage, which you can call 'justice tourism', is a way to seek the truth as seen by the traveller on foot—and to seek God through this truth.

Until tourism becomes an encounter with the dominant injustice of this world, it will stay exploitative. So, for the church and its agencies, the challenge is to bring to the tourism agenda alternative paradigms that have as their base values of justice, development, respect for cultures and ecological

sensitivity. When these things occur tourism will become a theatre of opportunity for solidarity, sharing and caring, of desiring to return to the place visited, not because it was exciting and good fun, but because it was challenging and ethically correct to return to continue to support the people visited and because it was socially responsible to do so. Tourism as a means of solidarity can be the path to justice and understanding.

Tourism can thus be a vehicle for building human community, for understanding and for recognising the many-sided gifts of God.

ECOT remains an ecumenical movement with a Christian basis and orientation, but it works with people across religious divides on an interfaith footing, recognising that the way forward in dealing with the great issues of our times requires bridging individuals and groups with shared concerns and commitments in building a common humanity. These networks and alliances are the place where each part brings to the rallying point their 'five loaves and two fishes,' their social capital as it were, to combine them for the larger good of human progress.

To those of us seeking to advance new ways of people encountering people and creation, the prophet Micah offers us a spiritual archetype, what is good and right to do. 'Love mercy, do justice, and walk humbly with God,' we are admonished. It is the call to treat the people and places we visit with humility and respect, recognising the distinct 'otherness' of what we encounter, knowing we can benefit and contribute to its enhancement in the event of a genuine encounter. Equally, it is a requisition on us to advocate the pursuance of and craving for justice as the vocation of a traveller.

I want to leave you with one final thought—a wise Chinese proverb that aptly sums up the dilemma and challenge to us in the vocation of the pastoral care of tourism: 'The farmer hopes for rain, the traveller for fine weather.'

Ranjan Solomon is the executive director of the Ecumenical Coalition on Tourism. This article is taken from a presentation he made at the Sixth World Congress on the Pastoral Care of Tourism in July 2004.

We are here for such a time as this

Max Ediger looks at the example of Esther

The world is at war. Depending on how you count, there are between 60 and 100 international, transnational, civil and regional armed conflicts under way at this moment. Since the terrible events of 9/11, the days of the Cold War have sadly returned and the world is once again divided between 'them' and 'us'. This line of separation divides people by ethnicity, nationality and religion. It raises the level of fear and increases the potential for violent conflict.

Since the end of World War II, conflicts have killed over 25 million people. About 90 per cent of these war casualties have been civilians, three out of four of them women and children—the ones least likely to cause or to carry out such devastating conflicts. In fact, in the wars of the last decade, more children have been killed than soldiers.

In the midst of this escalating violence, labels are being used by some of those in power to define for us who is friend and who is enemy, which religion is right and which is wrong, who to associate with and who to avoid. Labels such as these further divide our world and our communities.

As people of faith we cannot avoid being touched by this violence. Sometimes our churches have been the victims of the violence and other times have been involved directly in it or have stood by silently, too afraid to speak out prophetically and courageously.

These sad realities bring to mind the familiar story of the courage of Queen Esther. Esther became queen after Queen Vashti refused to cooperate with King Xerxes, who wanted to show her off to his friends. In anger Xerxes disposed of Vashti and began the search for a new queen.

Esther was selected because of her great beauty, but Xerxes failed to do his research and was unaware that his new queen was actually a Jew living in exile in his kingdom.

Esther's uncle, Mordecai, worked as one of the royal gate officials. He had angered Haman, Persia's chief political minister, by refusing to bow down whenever Haman passed. To get revenge, Haman managed to get the king's seal and used it to create an official order that all Jews, whom he had labelled as enemy, were to be killed.



Mordecai immediately sent word to his niece, Queen Esther, asking her to plead with the king to spare the Jews. Esther feared taking action because no-one, not even the queen, could enter the king's presence without an invitation. Mordecai responded to Esther with this challenge: 'Don't think that you will escape being killed with the rest of the Jews, just because you live in the king's palace. If you don't speak up now, we will somehow get help, but you and your family will be killed. It could be that you were made queen for a time like this!' (Esther 4:12–14)

Esther took up the challenge and approached the king, revealing to him that she was, in fact, an exiled Jew. Then she described Haman's devious plot to kill all Jews. Xerxes was furious. He sent Haman to the gallows that had been prepared for Mordecai, thus saving the Jews.

Three different characters in this story challenge us in three different ways.

Haman symbolises the racism and chauvinism that creates so much violence in the world today. This racism and chauvinism may grow out of a created fear of the 'other,' a tendency to be swayed by popular belief and prejudice or an arrogance that says only our way of living and believing is right. Such chauvinism both divides and excludes. It creates inter- and intrareligious strife and it justifies violence as a way of responding to those things we fear, dislike or do not understand. Even though we do not actually play the role of Haman, we may be his supporters if we find it safer to accept the labels he places on others and to remain silent as he carries out his cunning plots to divide and destroy. When Haman calls us to follow him, silence is no longer an option. We must make a choice.

Mordecai represents those who have become the victims of labels, racism and chauvinism. They suffer under the caste system, economic policies that benefit a privileged few, practices that discriminate based on gender, age, race, religion etc.

But Mordecai is not just a victim of Haman's oppression. Rather he is one of the marginalised who is unwilling to compromise. Refusing to bow to the threats of Haman or to stand alone in his struggle, he places God's law above the law imposed by humankind.

It brings a threat of death, not only to him, but to all of his people. Such is often the result of standing against Haman. Mordecai challenges us to stand firm in God's cause and to urge others to be unwavering even if it brings suffering and possible death.

Queen Esther is in a unique position. Even though she is, herself, a Jew and living in exile, she has moved into a beautiful palace of privilege and wealth. She can quite easily maintain her life of comfort and relative security by ignoring what is happening outside the palace walls. She also knows that what happened to Vashti can also happen to her if she angers Xerxes. But when her uncle challenges her, she sets her fear aside and, at great risk to her own safety and wellbeing, approaches the king and saves the Jews.

Like Esther, many of us live a privileged life amidst terrible suffering and oppression. Our silence helps us maintain our comforts and security, but it also makes it possible for Haman to carry out his inhuman acts of economic exploitation, torture, political oppression and discrimination. Esther challenges us to set our fears and selfishness aside and confront Haman. Her words to us are, 'It could be that you were placed here for such a time as this.'

In the midst of violence, oppression and division we are challenged to decide whether to support Haman by remaining silent and safe in our palaces, or to stand against him with the same kind of courage that Mordecai and Esther showed.

To find that courage we must keep in touch with the people outside the palace so that we can know their pain, their fear and their struggle. If we become isolated from them, we easily become partners with Haman and easily accept the labels he places on those he wishes to destroy.

As we read the news and watch events of violence and division unfold around us we need to keep in mind that there is no way for us to hide from our responsibility to those who are suffering. If we open ourselves to God, we may well hear God saying to us, 'I have placed you here for such a time as this.'

Max Ediger is director of the Hong Kong-based Centre for Justpeace in Asia.

Peace begins in family

Eighth FABC assembly

Some 800 bishops, priests and lay-people from 22 countries gathered at Deajeon Catholic University in Deajeon, South Korea, 17–23 August 2004 to attend the 8th Plenary Assembly of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences on the theme 'The Asian Family towards a Culture of Life'.

The assembly appreciated Asian cultural values and traditions that strengthened families, such as a profound reverence for life, strong family ties, hospitality, a sense of the sacredness of marriage and so on. But, on the other hand, it shared anxieties in an emerging global neo-liberal culture that threatened families in Asia—individualism, selfishness and greed, materialism and secularism. It emphasised that elite globalisation has caused untold poverty and migration.

Wars and conflicts also displaced people from homes. The spread of HIV/AIDS, illegal drugs and pornography has harmed families, especially the youth, who are most vulnerable. The rise of marital divorce is a pointer to the dwindling cohesion of the family.

Archbishop Orlando Quevedo, the most important author of the working paper 'Instrumentum Labois', responded to the pastoral question: How can family ministry and the church in Asia as a whole effectively respond to the pastoral challenges so described?

Dr Ahn Jae Woong greeted the assembly on behalf of CCA, emphasising the significant role of the family in peacemaking and sustaining. He stressed that the time is ripe for family issues to become part of our (churches) focal ministry.

'We are living in an age of war, terrorism, killing and genocide. Life is getting

devalued due to poverty, conflict and wars. 'The Asian Family towards a Culture of Life' is very appropriate and timely for us to further explore and reflect,' Dr Ahn said.

Archbishop Robert Sarah of the Vatican's Congregation for the Evangelisation of Peoples (CEP) said that 'the family must be considered as a starting point of any human and Christian experience. The Christian family should be a place where the truth of the gospel is the rule of life and the gift which the family members bring to the wider community. Families are not simply the object of the church's pastoral care; they are also the church's most effective agents of evangelisation.'

Six days of the assembly programs—morning mass, evening prayers, personal meditation, group works and plenary sessions—were dominated by the sharing, reflection, discussion and deliberation on 'family' issues. Participants were able to discuss these from various perspectives—social, psychological, pastoral and theological.

Archbishop Oswald Gomis, the Secretary General of the FABC said that the family, an integral part of life, is a gift of God to be in communion with him and the people around. He emphasised a triple-aspect of the family, among the FABC, in solidarity with the poor, appreciation of culture and in dialogue with other religious beliefs.

The assembly, in a statement, appealed to governments, groups, education institutions, mass media and people of other religious beliefs to join hand in hand to assist and accompany all families on their journey towards fullness of life and social sustainability.

—Prawate Khid-arn

I am ecologically yours

My dear fellow creatures (humans)—

You and I live on this planet
The Ancients call it 'The Mother Earth'
You have possessed it without any registered document
You have devastated it as if it is your paternal property!

You seem to have denied my right to live
You have denied my hunger and thirst
You don't allow me to eat even the dead wood
You seem to be very holy in the temple and in the church
But you do not manifest the power of holiness in relationships.

You have destroyed and plundered my abode
You call me a menace when I go out of the forest
You publish my photo when I move out
You have even blocked the source of my drink
You have directed it to your fields and cities
Don't I too have the right to drink the spring water?

You set fire on my abode
You conduct conferences on my fate
You call me 'environmental refugee'
What have you done to protect me?
Have you stopped playing the game of deforestation?
You talk much about afforestation
How many trees have you planted in your life?

You now talk about the interlinking of rivers
Did you ever think of my fate?
Are you not selfish?
I am sure my Creator will hear my prayer.
You may ask what is your prayer'
Yes, my prayer is that he may stop the rains
It is for your *metanoia*
How will you interlink rivers if there is no water in them?
Can any one of you create a spring in the desert?
Will you be able to create a rainbow in the sky?

When you walk on the roads, you crush me and kill me
I am the white ant, I belong to the family of ants
I eat your dead body
You may not know that I am your friend
I survive your fate
I am a rat snake
I don't bite you
But you still kill me.

I find my own abode
But you destroy it
Don't you know that I make your harvest hundred fold?
I eat all the rats which devour your food grains.

I am crow
I do the scavenging daily
Yet, you do not appreciate me
You call me names
Do you know the colour of God, my Creator?
He has all the seven colours of the rainbow,
Including black colour!

I am a street dog
You don't feed me
You own a pet dog and give a shelter in your home
You spend money for your pleasure
I shall tell you a truth
I clean your neighbourhood and ward off your diseases
You don't appreciate me
But you throw stones at me
Are you not ungrateful?

Hello friend!
We both belong to the web of life
We are 'birds of the same nest'
Let us live together
You may kill and eat me if it is for love's sake !

Let us bring praise to our creator daily
I shall sing
You may play the organ
I shall fly above your head
You may sit and watch
I shall crawl and run
You may measure my strength.

We have only one life
We have only one world to live
We have only one Creator
We have only one abode-The Mother Earth
I am,
'Ecologically Yours
I am, MJ, your friend living in Bangalore,
The garden city of India.

—M.J. Joseph

(Director, Ecumenical Christian Centre, Bangalore)

Rosalina Rabaria, woman priest

After seven years of gathering and shepherding a scattered Aglipayan flock in Maayon, Capiz, Rev. Rosalina Rabaria, the first woman priest of the Iglesia Filipina Independiente is happy to tell of God's faithfulness to her and to her parishioners. In no time a new church will be erected in the Maayon town proper, where it used to be, with its original and ancient bell.

Mrs Columba Eclipse, national president of the IFI women's organisation, visited the parish last year and recounts her sadness and tears on seeing a bamboo-built structure for a church. She vowed to do her best and returned to Maayon on 27 June with a throng of IFI women from neighbouring parishes, together with some money the women had collected for the roofing of a new church building.

Why, after seven years, was there only a bamboo-built church located on the outskirts of town? All of Reverend Rabaria's parishioners are young farmers who do not even own the land they till. True to its heritage, the local IFI is a church of and with the toiling masses, with no property to speak of, only a wealth of resolve and faithfulness to live out the IFI motto of Pro Deo et Patria, for God and Country. The IFI is the living fruit of the Philippine revolution of 1896, birthed by the efforts of the workers.

'Reverend', as she is fondly called by everyone in the parish, started her revival work amidst sneers from some in the area. Her efforts were being undermined, and she knew it, as her market vendor friends generously told her the words that were going around the town. Little did her detractors know that these sneers would turn people off and bring them to Rosalina's flock.

A woman for a priest? This disturbed the sensibilities of Maayon that recognised priesthood only as a male domain. In Reverend's parishioners I witnessed how reality altered religious imagery and symbolism. A woman priest became an accepted tradition, and in their experience a priest closer and more accessible, especially for the marginal-

ised and the poor. For me this is an important first step towards gender exclusivity and equity within the church and in the community, which is a thoroughly Christian valuation of all human beings.

Does a woman priest make a difference in a rural and impoverished parish? Perseverance is what the Reverend has. Two or three male priests tried the mission but gave it up, without someone to do housework.

The mass when we went there was lively, with many children and young people, demonstrating the vigorous and vital presence of IFI in Maayon as leaven and a beacon of light. This flock is shepherded by a woman, equally capable of the task that Jesus Christ did.

—Liza Lamis

Zacharias Mar Theophilus



Bishop Zacharias Mar Theophilus was been installed on 7 September as the second Suffragan Metropolitan of the Mar Thoma Church in India. The installation ceremony, held in Kozhencherry, was led by the head of the Mar Thoma Church, Metropolitan Philipose Mar Chrysostum. Dr Joseph Mar Irenaeus, a member of the CCA Presidium, is the other Suffragan Metropolitan of the Mar Thoma Church. Dr Zacharias Mar Theophilus is a member of the WCC executive committee and also of the CCA-WCC Liaison Group.

Correction

On page 31 of the June 2004 CCA News we had an announcement for a CCA intern. The closing date for applications was listed as 15 September 2005. This should have been 15 September 2004.

Christian population in India

Christians make up the third largest religious group in India. According to the latest census figures, there are 24 million Christians in the country, which has a total population of one billion plus. Hindus make up about 80 per cent of the population. In figures released by India's census commissioner, India's Muslim population grew by 36 per cent between 1991 and 2001 and now stands at 138 million, 13.4 per cent of the population.

Obituary

Mr Vorakit Kantakalung, general secretary of the Chiang Mai YMCA in Thailand died on 26 June of heart failure. He had been suffering from kidney failure for over two years. CCA General Secretary Ahn Jae Woong, in a message of condolence, said that 'Vorakit made great contributions to Thai society and to Asia in general, through his active involvement in the YMCA and other civil society groups. As a committee member of CCA-UN/ESCAP, he actively took part in its work and gave creative support to it.'

Under the leadership of Vorakit, Chiang Mai YMCA's community work expanded into nine northern provinces in the upper north of Thailand.

He was instrumental in getting the YMCA to actively promote peace-building efforts in the northern provinces of the country from 1992 through nonviolent methods of conflict resolution and dialogue between the military and local communities.

Vorakit was actively involved in the Asia and Pacific Alliance of YMCAs and served as the national general secretary of the Thai Alliance of YMCAs, alternating with the general secretary of the Bangkok YMCA.

The Hong Kong-based Asia and Pacific Alliance of YMCAs, in a tribute, described him as 'a true YMCA colleague, a friend, a mentor, a catalyst, a man of and for the people of Thailand and the region'.

Floods in Bangladesh

Flood-prone Bangladesh once again has suffered from its most dangerous natural calamity. Floodwaters started coming into Bangladesh from the Sylhet area situated on the northeastern side of the country from the beginning of July 2004.

Even after almost a month the floodwaters in the greater district of Sylhet did not recede. The levels in all the rivers were above the danger height for over a fortnight. Some of the mighty rivers of Bangladesh are in a very serious situation, especially during the rainy season. Riverbed levels have risen due to situation, which means water levels reach the danger level very quickly. The runway of the Sylhet domestic airport was under water for some days.

The Met-office predicted that the flood situation would rival 1988, when floodwaters engulfed almost two-thirds of the country.

The floods spread to the northern and central parts of the country, inundating vast areas.

People became marooned and helpless. The mighty Padma River was flowing 121 cm above the danger level and low-lying areas of the capital, Dhaka, started sinking. Poor people in those areas either built raised platforms or left their homes for safety. In some



parts people used boats for their day-to-day activities.

In 1988 most areas of Dhaka went under water and this year has been the same. Boats sailed on the roads. Rail and road links have been disconnected. Communications have already been disrupted.

Almost twenty million people were affected by the floods and needed immediate help such as food, shelter, pure water and medicine. The demand was so high that neither the government nor the NGOs able to meet all needs.

The churches responded as they always do in all calamities, be it floods, cyclones, disaster or even severe cold in the winter season. Emergency relief was given by the National Council of Churches in Bangladesh Youth.

—William Proloy Samadder



Some flood statistics

Affected districts	41
Population affected	34,466,198
Loss of human lives	1,042
Crops damaged (fully)	15,39,447 acres
Crops damaged (partially)	10,89,834 acres
Roads damaged (fully)	13,128 km
Roads damaged (partially)	43,714 km
Bridges and culverts damaged	3,494
Educational institutes affected (fully)	1,225
Educational institutes affected (partially)	23,140



Backbone of CCA

These six people are the backbone of the Christian Conference of Asia's office in Hong Kong—the administrative/secretarial staff.

Pictured at left are (back) Jennifer Ng (reception) and (front) Joyce Leung (accountant), Irene Chan, Heddy Ha, Candy Ha and Rosanna So.

2004 common prayer for peace and reunification of the Korean peninsula

Almighty God,
You nurture your entire creation with love;
You make the crooked way straight,
And transform sorrow to joy.
We thank you.

Once again we celebrate 15 August.
On this day sixty years ago we were liberated from Japan
But, without any reference to the will of our people,
Outside forces divided our land,
And we have carried this painful history of division until today.

God, forgive us. We experienced the joy of liberation and the sorrow of division.
The painful and confusing history has been a heavy burden for the entire nation.
But we Christians,
Who bear the responsibility to work for the peace and reunification of our land,
Have been simply floating through time over these past sixty years.

God,
We know your great and astounding love.
To our people who have carried the sorrowful cross of division,
You gave the light of hope with the 15 June South-North Agreement
Which brought amazing change to our people.

Though the wall of division still separates us,
Brothers and sisters in South and North
Are crossing the barrier and deepening our mutual trust.
Even in the weariness of our busy daily lives
We now always pray for our sisters and brothers on the other side.

God, we fervently pray that the change not end here,
that the distorted history of sixty years of division may be made straight,
Peace may reign, reunification may be attained,
And finally our people's new history may begin.
Let us Christians take the lead in this work.

Ardently trusting that peace and reunification of this land is near,
We pray in the name of Jesus Christ, Amen.

This prayer was written jointly by the National Council of Churches in Korea and the Korean Christian Federation