



Christian Conference of Asia

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1957-2007

Special Issue

**Fiftieth Anniversary of the
Christian Conference of Asia**

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Joy, Hope, Giving Thanks to God

'Preserve values of the past, adapt to the present and shape the future for God's mission in Asia'



Fellowship (*koinonia*), partnership and service (*diakonia*) remain the basic principles of CCA to witness the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ everywhere in Asia and around the world

The fiftieth anniversary celebrations of the Christian Conference of Asia were held in Parapat (an international symposium), Pematang Siantar (spiritual revival) and Medan (celebration) during 3–7 March 2007. The celebrations went far beyond our original expectations and were on a grand scale. I estimate that there were over 200,000 people who took part in the three events. All participants were greatly impressed with the warm hospitality of the churches in North Sumatera. Dr Henriette Hutabarat Lebang says, 'We were blanketed with the love and hospitality of the churches and people in North Sumatera. They shared what they have to welcome us and to have us stay with them. They have tried their best to make our stay more comfortable, with the beautiful panoramic view of Toba Lake.'

The fiftieth anniversary celebration was a time of joy, hope and giving thanks to God. For the past fifty years, the Christian Conference of Asia has been buffeted by the tumultuous changes of the new era, not only doing good work in many instances, but also falling short in others. Fellowship (*koinonia*), partnership and service (*diakonia*) remain the basic principles of CCA to witness the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ everywhere in Asia and around the world.

These naturally characterise the life and fellowship of believers, not for their own sake, but for the 'fulfilment of a common task, to serve all those in need'. (U Kyaw Than)

The Asian delegates who assembled at the 1957 Parapat conference expressed their desire to have direct contacts and relations with one another rather than through the other missionary initiatives to which they were related. Therefore the Parapat conference brought into focus the 'Asian' identity of the EACC/CCA. At the international symposium this March, Rev. Dr S.A.E. Nababan stressed that the main task of the Asian churches is mission and witness. Partnership must empha-

sise equity and solidarity between people. It should continue to be shaped by an active and dynamic process, developing over time in three phases—pioneering, differentiation and integration.

The fiftieth anniversary celebration witnessed the perpetuity of the church. Among all forms of society that bind people together, CCA continues to commit and devote itself to change the world for peace and the unity of humankind. The reason for our confidence is that we know that CCA, although having likeness to civil societies in its outward form, has been rooted far and deep in the visible world. It draws strength from various resources, which can be tested by ecumenical spirit and experience, and the fellowship of believers. It is endowed with the presence of Christ's own undying life. 'Lo, I am with you, even unto the end of world.'

We today continue living in a divided global society. We now face the urgent need to secure the freedom of future generations to sustain their lives in the world. Changing this is a challenge for the church today.

- What are the challenges facing Christianity in the twenty-first century?
- Who are the leaders whose voices need to be heard?
- What churches and individuals—known and unknown, small and large—are models for faithfulness and effectiveness for the upcoming generation?

As families and friends gathered to celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of CCA, we celebrated God's gift of freedom and love that conquers death. We gave thanks to God for many blessings and prayed for peace in the affairs of people. We gave thanks to God for the life and work of CCA during the past five decades. The formation of CCA was always in God's plan.

May God bless you.

—Prawate Khid-arn

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Fifty Years of Life Together

The Christian Conference of Asia celebrates its fiftieth anniversary



Parapat, North Sumatra, Indonesia—the site of the meeting that conceived the Christian Conference of Asia and the venue for CCA's jubilee celebrations fifty years later

The Christian Conference of Asia celebrated its fiftieth anniversary on 3–7 March. Returning to the site of the original meeting that conceived the idea of a regional ecumenical organisation in 1957, 120 overseas and 100 local participants gathered in Parapat on the shores of beautiful Lake Toba in North Sumatra, Indonesia. They took part in worship services, panel discussions, storytelling sessions and even tree planting.

The celebrations began with worship in over fifty churches in Parapat and Samosir Island, symbolising that CCA is rooted in the local church.

Many of the participants preached and all enjoyed the music, fellowship and food shared by the local congregations. There were also many Bible studies and opportunities for worship during the celebrations.

The celebrations brought together Asian Christian leaders from all walks of life to make an assessment of the ecumenical movement in Asia. They gained a greater understanding of the vision and spiritual depths of the pioneers of the movement who ventured into an unknown future to form the East Asia Christian Conference in 1957 (later renamed the Christian Conference of Asia).



To achieve this, the participants listened to four in-depth panel discussions on CCA's fifty-year journey: 'Revisiting the Past', 'Strengthening Leadership', 'Present and Future' and 'Missiological and Ecumenical Challenges'.

A highlight of the celebration was the storytelling session led by Ron O'Grady, who introduced previous leaders and friends who reminisced about their time and involvement with CCA over the last half century. Interestingly two people who were at the original meeting in Parapat in 1957 were present in 2007—Dr Kyaw Than, a former general secretary, and Rev. Dr Soritua A.E. Nababan, now a president of the World Council of Churches.

An overwhelming feature of the celebrations was the involvement of the churches of North Sumatera. A local organising committee raised a significant amount of money to make these celebrations something that no-one will ever forget. Wherever the participants went in North Sumatera, colourful banners over streets and on churches proclaimed the jubilee.

A spiritual revival service was held in Pematang Siantar, where a large gathering took place in 1957 in the presence of President Sukarno. Before this, the participants were transported in style in

350 *becaks* (small rickshaw-like vehicles based on old motorcycles).

The celebrations culminated in a huge worship in the Teladan Stadium in Medan, the capital of North Sumatera, attended by 150,000 people, in the presence of the Minister of Religious Affairs, representing the president.

One morning, the participants were raised from their beds before dawn to plant trees on a hillside near Parapat. This act symbolised CCA's concern for the degradation and depletion of scarce natural resources around the world. The government of North Sumatera has decided that henceforth this hill will be called 'Lake Toba Asian Mission Hill'. Each year on World Environment Day a service will be held on this site.

The celebrations were not just about the past, they were also a time to look to the future and identify new opportunities and challenges to equip the churches to venture in to mission and models for ministries unique and decisive to the Asian context.

The general secretary of CCA, Dr Prawate Khid-arn said, 'The need of the hour is to pool all our resources together in order to transform this continent and the world to become humane, just and compassionate.'

The celebrations were not just about the past, they were also a time to look to the future

Revisiting the Past

A New World

Soritua A.E. Nababan



There were all sorts of situations, socially, politically, economically, culturally and religiously in the world at the time of the formation of East Asia Christian Conference. Peoples in the newly independent countries in Asia and Africa were generally 'drunken with freedom'. However, among the influencing factors at that time was the escalation of the cold war between two blocs of ideologies—capitalism in the West led by the USA and communism in the East led by Soviet Union.

The result of this cold war is manifested in the division of the Korean peninsula.

In the 1950s a new world was being born and several nations in Asia were breaking away from the clutches of colonialism.

The Bandung Asian-African Conference in Indonesia in 1955 was a common manifestation of the will of Asian and African countries to become independent and to demand immediate abolition of colonialism in the world.

It succeeded in forming a solid front against the 'white world' and the cold war between the superpowers that affected Asian countries.

An Ecumenical Fellowship

Kyaw Than

It is important to remember that the 1957 Parapat conference was preceded by the 1938 World Missionary Conference at Tambaram near Madras in India. It was there that the Asian delegates expressed their desire to have direct contacts and relations with one another rather than through the initiatives of the missionary agencies to which they were related. As the Second World War broke out the year after the Tambaram conference, it was not until the end of 1949 that the International Missionary Council and the newly formed World Council of Churches could bring the Asian church people together to follow up their request.

The Asian-African Conference at Bandung, Indonesia, in 1955 strengthened the concept of newly independent nations in Asia and Africa to play their role as nonaligned nations when many in the world were seen as aligned either with the USA or the USSR. Asked if the Parapat conference was a form of Christian Bandung, I pointed out that EACC was not a colour bloc but an ecumenical fellowship in which Christians in Australia and New Zealand were accepted with open arms.

Why 'Conference'?

Soritua A. E. Nababan

The choice of 'conference' instead of 'council' for the name of EACC/CCA was to stress the main reason of the Asian churches' coming together for the sake of common mission and witness. Many Asian church leaders were convinced that Asian churches could not afford to start discussing centuries-old theological differences inherited from churches in the West, and that the main task of the churches in Asia is mission and witness. 'Council' would imply 'faith and order', while 'conference' is more flexible. Asian church leaders were also concerned that the new organisation should embrace as many Christians as possible. And 'conference' is more inclusive than 'council'. Hence, the members are not only churches but also national councils of churches and national Christian councils with other Christian organisations.

Cooperation and Fellowship

Kyaw Than



The East Asia Christian Conference was set up to be an organ of continuing cooperation and fellowship among the churches and national Christian councils in Asia, Australia and New Zealand. In the words of D.T. Niles (the first general secretary of the EACC), the vocation of the EACC was ‘building up within the life of each church and country a group of men and women, both older and younger, who are willing to probe the frontiers of the Christian enterprise ...’

Fellowship was not just for its own sake but for the fulfilment of a common task—to confess the Christ in the midst of our contemporary challenges. In the past the concentration of Christian thinkers was about the uniqueness of the Christian claim as over against the claims of other religious traditions. But already at the inaugural assembly of the EACC in 1959 in Kuala Lumpur the emphasis of Asian churches was on the importance of dialogue with people of these religious traditions rather than the encounter with these religious systems. The effort was to probe the frontiers of relations between peoples with different religious commitments and loyalties, taking into account their hopes and concerns.

People’s Movement

Chitra Fernando



Revisiting the past, considering CCA as a whole, I realise that we have travelled a long way since 1957. The EACC came into being as the first fruit of a few dynamic Christian leaders who, for the most part, ignored the efforts of the WCC to play down its role and purpose. But you couldn’t by any stretch of the imagination have called it a people’s movement. During the next decade, CCA was often accused of merely picking up key individuals and working through them than working through the churches. It was also accused of dictating to the churches instead of working with them. CCA was sensitive to this criticism and made an all-out effort to make the member churches and councils aware of their responsibility.

More than that, CCA has been turning full circle—not merely towards church people but towards people as a whole—just people, all people.

Putting its heart and soul into areas like development and service, battling prostitution tourism and standing up for human rights is clear evidence of this new trend.



Strengthening Partnership

Church as Minority

Roger Herft



It is important that one does not lose a sense of hope or perspective in respect of the ecumenical endeavours that are present, even though they may appear not to have the same priority as before. The 'Australian Churches Covenanting Together' is a reaffirmation of churches' commitment as partners on the ecumenical journey. Other marks are the commitment to the Decade to Overcome Violence and to the Millennium Goals, as well as local initiatives of combined social justice action, evangelism, joint ministry projects and common approaches to political leaders on issues of health, welfare, employment, environment, race relations etc.

In considering the causes of the seeming dissipation of energy once put into the ecumenical world, one needs to recognise that the process of marginalisation experienced by the Christian churches in minority situations in most of Asia has affected the churches in Australia, New Zealand and in many parts of the West. Gary Bouma, in his book *Australian Soul*, suggests that a part of the marginalisation process that has taken place in mainstream Christian religions in Australia is their identification with a particular linguistic or cultural group.

This makes them afraid of progressing with an agenda such as ecumenism, which may lead to further movement away from their 'comfort zones'. Faced with global conflict and terror, the massive degradation of the environment, the greed and consumerism pushed by large corporations, humankind has moved into a foetal position finding a safe womb in which to live with no entry permitted for a 'neighbour' or a 'different other'. In the midst of all the challenges for institutional survival, ecumenism remains a call from the gospel—made a necessary imperative through the prayer of our Lord. We are living in a world fragmented by violence and division, an environment whose ecological balance is in crisis, a world where religion is in the news more for the wrong than the right reasons.

May I suggest that keeping the fiftieth anniversary of CCA speaks to such a fragmented world primarily by offering the hospitality that comes from God. Ecumenism has often seen its task and vision limited to the work of Christian unity. In the CCA the context of the church as a minority in the midst of other faiths has meant that it has always had to see its journey through the wider vision of humanity as a whole.



Partners

Ad Mook



Amongst churches, partnership is a concept with a century-old ecumenical tradition. It has been part of the discourse of an independence movement aimed at countering colonial thinking within churches. The concept is inspired by several biblical verses that emphasise equity and solidarity between peoples. Critical thinkers have stated that partnership is not about funding but about conveying unity between organisations—thus, it is not a tool to make project funding more effective but an aim in itself. Many of us have noticed that these days the ecumenical movement is going through difficult times. Not only financially, but also content-wise, churches are reluctant to embrace ecumenism. Other urgent matters get priority. And so the traditional partners see that the ownership of the ecumenical movement is missing. But on top of that the traditional partners themselves—being related to churches in their home countries—face the same difficulties. The life of the so-called mainline churches is getting more and more complicated, resulting in many people leaving these churches to join the more evangelical churches.

I wonder, however, if, by joining hands with other streams of Christianity, the ecumenical movement can remain a movement with open eyes and ears for the needs of the societies we live in and continue its critical role towards injustice, poverty and violation.

Sharing

Henriette Hutabarat Lebang



Self-reliance in ecumenism is only possible if ecumenism is considered a part of the identity of the church and, therefore, as crucial to the life and witness of the churches. When gathered in Parapat, we were all impressed by the warm hospitality of churches in North Sumatera. CCA began fifty years ago in that soil with the same spirit of optimism, of a promising future of self-reliance of Asian churches, symbolised by the arrival of a young calf, which was the first contribution of a local Batak congregation from a village on the shores of Lake Toba. Sharing is embedded in Asian culture and it finds expression in many forms. Asians tend to be generous in sharing their resources—but these do not immediately translate into monetary (dollar) terms. In order to mobilise sharing of resources among CCA member churches, CCA needs to increase information sharing, capture the needs of Asian churches, plan a regular church visit, introduce and encourage Asian churches to host CCA programs, facilitate the leadership development of member churches and review publication policy with consideration of translation.

For their part, CCA member churches also need to take their membership seriously, integrate their financial contribution to CCA in their annual budget, facilitate information sharing to cultivate ecumenical understanding and support, develop strategic leadership development and consider hosting CCA staff in their headquarters.



Present and Future

A New Approach Needed

Mathews George Chunakara



When we celebrate the golden jubilee of CCA, looking at the present scenario and into the future, it is important to reflect on the past too. The CCA we see today has grown institutionally, although the tent has been shifting from one place to another. CCA has reached a stage of being an established and mature ecumenical organisation and institution.

While CCA has tried to respond faithfully to its enduring vision and some significant contributions have been made over the last fifty years, as in other parts of the world the ecumenical movement in Asia is in a state of general decline. This can be due to factors such as leadership crises, the proliferation of ecumenical organisations at national and regional levels, increasing denominationalism, lack of ecumenical formation among the younger generation in churches, lack of capacity building efforts and a general lack of vision and theological thinking.

CCA needs to consider Christians in Asia who are not part of the ecumenical movement or of mainstream denominations, e.g. Christians in China, Vietnam, Bhutan, Afghanistan, Iran etc.

CCA needs to see the practical application of ecumenism in the context of religious pluralism. Other issues in the socioeconomic and political arena of Asian life that need to be addressed properly are peace and security concerns in Northeast Asia, Southeast Asia and South Asia, human rights, the growth of religious intolerance and the emergence of religious fundamentalism, increasing HIV/AIDS, human trafficking, migration etc. These issues cannot be possibly addressed from a centralised office and structure, hence a new approach and style of functioning is necessary to develop an effective way of addressing them.

Risk-taking Leadership

Lesley Capus



Ecumenism, both as a concept or principle and a day-to-day way of life, should begin from within the CCA leadership. We must not emphasise traditional leadership quality that is founded on scholarship, philosophical systems and head trips. If we limit the exercise of leadership to such parameters, I doubt if the biblical prophets and even Jesus (an out-of-school youth) and his ragtag bunch of organisers would qualify for the post.

CCA and our churches should exercise genuine shared leadership. While CCA is reflecting on a new way of doing ecumenism, it must re-examine the need for critical analysis of the ecumenical movement's ministry with youth and women.

The leadership of CCA should push the ecumenical boat further into the deep—to be risk takers in the context and challenges we are facing such as confronting repression and other life-threatening situations. CCA needs to affirm ecumenism does not only mean unity among churches but also solidarity with other well-meaning social movements that are struggling for the wellbeing of God's people.

Just as CCA has upheld the spirit of the first Asian ecumenical gathering in Parapat fifty years ago—and of working together for common task/goal (*gotong royong*)—the ecumenical movement is called to struggle against the Empire and its imperial framework and theology.

A Wider Ecumenism

Hyun Ju Bae



Asian ecumenism, as represented by CCA, has evolved towards a wider ecumenism in its relationship with the Roman Catholic Church and persons of other faiths. Building a broader or macro-ecumenism is an important task for the future of just peace and abundant life for all peoples in Asia. In order to build communities of peace for all, we need to cultivate relationships and maintain solidarity with all partners beyond all kinds of barriers.

But in reality this is not that simple because many Asian churches, in spite of their membership in CCA, do not feel comfortable with such an active and progressive move towards a wider ecumenism. This is especially the case with those churches and denominations in Asia whose membership largely consists of those who have experienced radical conversion from traditional religions. For CCA to draw more support and participation from member churches in Asia towards a wider ecumenism, the role of national-level ecumenical organisations such as NCCs and the ecumenical equivalents of the member denominations is immensely important.

From my own experience, there is a wide gap between the ecumenical movement in national, regional and global levels and the ordinary local Christian communities. Ecumenism is not just about a series of great statements but has something to do with the building of an alternative life culture. Often the prominent leaders or agents of ecumenical movements are lay persons, women and youth. In contrast, most of the ministers in the local churches in Asia are clergymen whose lifestyle and culture is deeply embedded in traditional patriarchal framework and authoritative clericalism. CCA should continue to work as one of the active international networking agencies for alternative globalisation in Asia in the twenty-first century—where the negative impact of neoliberal globalisation resounds through the weaker sections of Asian societies, threatening the life of communities, the peace and justice of society and the sustainability of the ecological environment.



Missiological and Ecumenical Challenges

A New Framework

Preman Niles



There are two important challenges that the churches and the ecumenical movement in Asia face today. The first challenge has to do with the troubled relationship between the churches and the ecumenical movement in Asia. Increasingly, the two are drifting apart because of tensions that have developed over the past fifty years. The tension was supposed to be creative—the churches being geared to conserving the gains of the past and the ecumenical movement to venturing into uncharted territory. When this creative tension did not last, the ecumenical movement became isolated from the churches while the churches, bereft of the ecumenical spirit, uncritically followed secular economic and political models based on power arrangements. How could this be remedied so that tensions may not lead to polarisation but could instead become a creative tension? The second challenge, related to the first, is missiological. What is the framework or model within which the churches with the support of the CCA could express their call to mission?

I would set out a framework that has emerged through the missiological thinking of the ecumenical movement in Asia, which I have called 'the people of God in the midst of all God's peoples.' This framework, on the one hand, represents an alternative to a confrontational approach to mission, which Western missionaries and neo-orthodox theologians bequeathed to us. On the other, it expresses the new ecumenical spirit that is needed for our time—an ecumenical spirit that embraces people of all faiths, not just Christians, and the poor and vulnerable in Asian societies—and at the same time presents a challenge for mission that could hold together the churches and the ecumenical movement.

A New Vision

Hermen Shastri



The enduring mandate of CCA since its inception was grounded on the basis that to be church in Asia was to be ecumenical. If the ecumenical movement should live on to a new generation, then, it must precisely be this kind of vision that must inspire the new generation to join the movement, and be able to fire their imagination to engage in promoting ecumenism. However, there is every reason to worry because there are trends that blur the ecumenical vision. These include the increase in denominationalism, the proliferation of churches affirming particular identities outside of mainstream Christianity and the mushrooming of churches that have bought into the logic of individualism, making religion a marketable industry.

The younger generation, once pioneers of the ecumenical movement, are now less and less attracted to institutional Christianity and are opting to join NGOs. There have also developed non-ecumenical international and regional parachurch organisations that are drawing churches away from traditional ecumenical structures. Affirming the need to broaden the ecumenical vision in Asia, CCA cannot claim to be the 'privileged instrument' of the ecumenical movement in Asia so long as it remains a protestant institution.

A New Terrain

Carmencita Karagdag



Understandably, the early years of CCA were marked by a preoccupation with the internal unity of the church and the ecumenical family in Asia, which is after all a product of the Western missionary enterprise that accompanied and legitimised European and later American colonial expansion in our part of the world. By the late sixties and early seventies, Asian churches had begun seriously addressing missiological concerns beyond the narrow confines of common evangelical enterprise and the search for church unity. The years that followed continued the focus on social engagement, laying stress on the need to discern the signs of the times and respond to *kairos*.

Recently, themes seem to take on a more romantic approach, which obscures in a sense prevailing harsh realities by focusing on long-term visions of hope, if not vague alternatives. This when the sad fact is that long-entrenched global and local structures of injustice and violence, that are the main impediment to realising communities of peace and fullness of life for all, have yet to be deconstructed or transformed and those held captive have yet to find liberation from dehumanising servitude. We Christians are impelled by our faith to work untiringly for peace by addressing the root causes of violence and war—economic exploitation, despair, disempowerment, assault on sovereignty, erosion of cultural identity, destruction of the ecology and life support systems—all invariably associated with corporate, and now militarised, globalisation.

Of particular concern to people of faith, and especially those from Asia, which is home to the world's major religions, is the emergence of religion as a major political and ideological force. For empire building needs not only ideological but also theological justification for its project of domination. It is thus incumbent on faith-based communities to reclaim religious space for radical transformative action, an arena which, if left uncontested and abandoned solely to religious extremists, can only give free rein to the very forces that would in the end destroy life and demolish the hard-won achievements of human civilisation. The imperative clearly is to move beyond narrow ecumenism and ordinarily innocuous interfaith dialogue to the still unexplored, if more risky, terrain of ecumenism and interfaith solidarity.



Fifty Years: A Timeline

Notable events and achievements in the life of the Christian Conference of Asia

1957	East Asia Christian Conference constituted in Parapat: 'The Common Evangelistic Task of the Churches in East Asia'
1959	Inauguration of the East Asia Christian Conference, Kuala Lumpur: 'Witnessing Together'
1962	East Asia Christian Conference establishes first full-time program desk for youth
1964	3rd General Assembly, Bangkok: 'The Christian Community within the Human Community'
	First Asian Youth Assembly in Dumaguete City, Philippines: 'Christ the Life'
1965	EACC establishes Asian Christian Service in Saigon, Vietnam
1966	East Asia Christian Conference covenants with World Student Christian Federation-Asia Pacific Region to strengthen ecumenical student ministry
1968	4th General Assembly, Bangkok: 'In Christ All Things Hold Together'
1970	Association of Christian Institutes for Social Concern (ACISCA) formed by East Asia Christian Conference, with seven members—now almost 50+ centres and movements Asia-wide
1971	Urban Industrial Mission and Federation of Asian Bishops Conference—Office on Human Development jointly establish Asian Committee for People's Organising (ACPO)
1973	East Asia Christian Conference changes its name to the Christian Conference of Asia Documentation for Action Groups in Asia established in Tokyo by CCA-Urban Rural Mission
1973	5th General Assembly, Singapore: 'Christian Action in the Asian Struggle'
1974	Decision to centralise the CCA office in Singapore. Prior to this, staff were working from their home countries
1975	Asian Ecumenical Course initiated
1975	First Asia Sunday observed on a Sunday before Pentecost, the day CCA was inaugurated
1977	6th General Assembly, Penang: 'Jesus Christ in Asian Suffering and Hope'
1978	Asian Christian Art Association (ACAA) established
	CCA and UN-ESCAP jointly establish program on Training of Trainers for Rural Youth
1979	First issue of <i>CTC Bulletin</i>
1981	7th General Assembly, Bangalore: 'Living in Christ with People'
	Committee for Asian Women (CAW) established by CCA-Urban Rural Mission and Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences—Office on Human Development
1982	Ecumenical Coalition on Third World Tourism established by CCA and the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences. The Pacific Conference of Churches, All Africa Conference of Churches, Middle East Council of Churches and Latin American Council of Churches then joined

1983	Asian Human Rights Commission (AHRC) and Asian Legal Rights Council (ALRC) inaugurated in Tokyo on Human Rights Day by CCA-International Affairs CCA works with Asian Associations of Theological Schools to establish Program for Theology and Culture in Asia (PTCA)
1985	8th General Assembly, Seoul: 'Jesus Christ Sets Free to Serve' CCA expelled from Singapore (30 December)
1988	CCA decentralises to Manila, Chiang Mai, Hong Kong and Osaka
1989	First Asia Mission Conference organised in Cipanas, Indonesia Asian Migrant Center (AMC) established by CCA-Urban Rural Mission
1990	Ecumenical Coalition on Third World Tourism (ECTWT) establishes End Child Prostitution in Asian Tourism (ECPAT)
1990	9th General Assembly, Manila: 'Christ our Peace: Building a Just Society' Program for Theology and Culture in Asia (PTCA) establishes the Forum of Asian Theological Librarians (ForATL) First edition of CCA hymnal, <i>Sound the Bamboo</i> , is published jointly with Asian Institute for Liturgy and Music (AILM)
1991	CCA staff relocate their offices to Hong Kong as mandated by the General Assembly in Manila
1993	General Committee approve the purchase of a property for a CCA centre to centralise all staff under one roof
1994	CCA facilitates the formation of South Asian Council of Churches (SACC) and the first meeting of SACC in Hyderabad, India
1995	10th General Assembly, Colombo: 'Hope in God in a Changing Asia'
1996	China Christian Council and CCA Youth jointly organise 'Reading the Bible through Asian Eyes' in Nanjing, China, the first time a CCA program is hosted inside mainland China CCA and FABC jointly organise the first Asian Movement for Christian Unity (AMCU)
1997	CCA initiates and founds the Congress of Asian Theologians (CATS). The first CATS was held in Korea
1998	CCA initiates the founding of the Kampuchea Christian Council CCA organises the first program in Nepal, which led to the formation of Nepal Christian Council CCA invited by the Pontifical Council, Vatican, to attend the special assembly of the Synod of Bishops for Asia held in Rome
2000	11th General Assembly, Tomohon: 'Time for Fullness of Life for All'
2001	CCA establishes the Mekong Ecumenical Partnership Program (MEPP)
2003	CCA and YMCA jointly establish the Interfaith Cooperation Forum CCA establishes the South Asia Ecumenical Partnership Program (SAEPP)
2004	CCA establishes the Asian Interfaith Network on HIV/AIDS (AINA)
2005	12th General Assembly, Chiang Mai: 'Building Communities of Peace for All'
2006	CCA moves to Chiang Mai, 1 July
2007	CCA turns 50

CCA's Fiftieth Anniversary



A warm welcome to the participants at the airport in Medan



Cultural performances were given by the many and various ethnic groups of North Sumatera at meetings, dinners and services



Soritua Nababan and Kyaw Than at the site of the original meeting in Parapat that conceived the East Asia Christian Conference (later the Christian Conference of Asia) in 1957, which they attended



Bible studies and discussion groups were very popular with both the 120 overseas and 100 Indonesian participants



Toshi Arai at the opening ceremony



A spiritual revival service in Pematang Siantar



A huge crowd of 150,000 people attended the fiftieth anniversary

CCA's Jubilee

Indonesian churches' generous hospitality and able and systematic organising and hosting of the fiftieth anniversary events in Parapat, Pematang Siantar and Medan in North Sumatera ensure CCA's fiftieth anniversary was a great success



Banners were everywhere in North Sumatera—on churches, over roads and on public buildings



Eang Chhun (centre) and Eang Chhun (right) plant a small tree at a predawn ceremony at the newly named 'Lake Toba Asian Mission Hill'



Riding through the streets of Pematang Siantar on 350 *becaks*



Worship and celebrations in the Teladan Stadium in Medan, which included many choirs and hundreds of dancers



A Rich Heritage

CCA's general secretary reflects on the memorable experience of the jubilee celebrations in North Sumatera



Dr Prawate Khid-arn addresses the international symposium in Parapat

It was amazing that we finally gathered in Parapat, the birthplace of the Christian Conference of Asia, to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of its establishment. Being there at that time was indeed a memorable experience for each and every one. We were truly blessed to have so many with us on this occasion.

It was in Parapat on 17–26 March 1957 that Asian church leaders, young and old, women and men, clergy and lay, decided to establish the East Asia Christian Conference for the unity of Asian churches. As history goes, we are told that the local Batak congregation brought a calf to the conference and offered it as a gift to the Asian church leaders. Dr D.T. Niles, one of the pioneers of the ecumenical movement in Asia, graciously accepted the calf from the Batak people. Let us not forget that the birth of this organisation lies rooted in the lives of the local congregations and continues

to find its identity in the struggle and suffering of the grassroots people of Asia.

Over the last fifty years, the Christian Conference of Asia has carried with it the rich heritage of its mission among the lives of the people in Asia. We were delighted to recollect, reflect and celebrate this heritage during the celebrations in North Sumatera. Our hearts were filled with gratitude to God for his faithfulness, guidance and continuing presence with us since the birth of East Asia Christian Conference (now the Christian Conference of Asia).

During those fifty years, the Christian Conference of Asia has been buffeted by the tumultuous changes of the new era, doing good work in many instances but falling short in others. The issues of primary concern to CCA have remained fairly constant: Asian theological education, church and society, Christ and cultures, freedom, democracy, gender equity, people's struggle and human rights, natural calamities and many other socioeconomic

questions. Thus the key agenda items for the first conference in 1957, 'The Common Evangelistic Task of the Churches in East Asia,' affirmed the role of churches to become God's instrument for a better world.

We remember our former church leaders, especially Dr D.T. Niles, a founding member and first general secretary, who laid down the ecumenical mission that 'the churches in Asia accept that they belong to one another and are willing increasingly to live a shared life together.'

Let us keep in mind that we can only build a successful future if we preserve the values of the past, adapt to the present and shape the future according to our faith and devotion to the Lord Jesus Christ.

Today, we are living in a divided global society. We now face an urgent need to secure the freedom for future generations to sustain their lives in the world. This is a challenge for the church today.

No shift in the way we think and act can be more critical than this: we must put people as God's people at the centre of everything we do. There is no responsibility greater than that of enabling women, men and youth to make the world a peaceful and livable place for all.

In today's uncertain world there are no easy answers to these new challenges. They demand innovative approaches, sustained commitment and the closest possible cooperation between churches and each and every one of us.

We must make God's mission visible. We must do more than talk about our future. We must start to create it now. Let the jubilee symposium and celebration signal the renewed commitment for each and every one of us, by agreeing on our common vision. Let us prove this commitment by acting on it.

CCA owes a debt of gratitude to the Indonesian churches, especially the churches of North Sumatera, the home of CCA, for their graciousness and their warm hospitality. Without their participation, it would have been almost impossible to make the event the success it was.

—Prawate Khid-arn

Fifty Years of Stories

Ron O'Grady interviews those who were there in CCA's half-century

They were four young men from different countries who set out in 1957 to change the thinking of Asian churches. Their undisputed leader was a young Methodist minister from Sri Lanka whose full name was Daniel Thambyrajah Niles, only nobody ever used those names. To everyone he met he was plain 'D.T.'. His assistant was a Burmese layman named U Kyaw Than. The third person was Alan Brash, a Presbyterian minister from New Zealand who was responsible for inter-church aid, and the fourth was M.M. Thomas, a lay theologian from India.

Only one of the original four is still alive. I asked him who was his greatest inspiration in those years.

U Kyaw Than

It would have to be M.M. Thomas. He was a layman like myself and he recruited me to the EACC. I always admired him, he was such a humble person yet he had a great intellect, a very keen mind.

Three years after the original four began they added a fifth member to their team—Soritua Nababan, a young theologian from Indonesia. I asked him the same question.

Soritua Nababan

There were many great men in those years. I respected Visser 't Hooft in the World Council of Churches. But most of all D.T. Niles was a very special person. He was an outstanding preacher and a great church leader.

D.T. was the voice of the Asian churches in those early years. His son, Preman, followed him into the ecumenical movement, and he shares some recollections of his father.

D. Preman Niles

I shared my father's ecumenical vision but not necessarily his ideas about the Christian ministry. He was furious with me for not



seeking ordination. I was certain that my ministry was to be a theologian and a teacher, but not necessarily an ordained minister. He soon gave up trying to 'bully' me into becoming an ordained minister. One day my wife heard him hold our young daughter, Damayanthi, in his arms, bless her and say, 'One day, my child, you will take my place.' In a few months Damayanthi, who is a professor of theology in a seminary, will also be ordained into the ministry of the church.

U Kyaw Than,
Alan Brash,
M.M. Thomas and
D.T. Niles

My first meeting with D.T. was at the 1964 EACC Assembly in Thailand. I was a young man first time out of New Zealand, totally overwhelmed by the many languages and cultures at the assembly. Sitting at breakfast on the second day I had a shock when the great D.T. came along and sat down opposite me. 'You are O'Grady?' he asked. 'Yes,' I quavered. 'Good—then I want you to write the minutes of this assembly.' With D.T. there was never any question of saying 'yes' or 'no'. The oracle had spoken. So there I was, not knowing the names of anyone and desperately trying to understand what was happening.

Though it is largely unrecorded, both women and young people made a huge contribution to the early growth of the EACC

With the help of others I finally completed the task and at the end of the assembly this exhausted young man handed the minutes over to D.T. He quickly scanned them and then commented that it seemed all right but I had the introduction wrong. This was not the second assembly but the third. 'But,' I said, 'the previous meeting in 1959 was called the 'inaugural' assembly which means the first, so this has to be the second.' That was when I discovered that one did not argue with D.T. 'No,' he said with finality, 'this will be the third assembly'—and so it was.

In that early period of the EACC one Indian woman made a simple but quite significant contribution—Shanti Solomon of India.

Corazon Tabing-Reyes

In 1956 an international group of six women toured six Asian countries to strengthen relations between Christian women and try to heal the wounds of war. Shanti Solomon of India was one of the group but she was unable to obtain a visa to enter Korea and the team had to leave her behind in the Philippines. While she was meditating there the inspiration came to have women in every country pray for each other and share their gifts to support those in need. Inspired by the story of the widow's mite, she wanted even the poorest woman to take part and so the Fellowship of the Least Coin was born.

Though it is largely unrecorded, both women and young people made a huge contribution to the early growth of the EACC. Under the guidance of Soritua Nababan and his successors, youth conferences influenced many of the young people who later became leaders in the ecumenical movement. Dumaguete City was the venue for the first regional youth conference, followed by Singapore, at which Prime Minister Lee Kwan Yew was a speaker, and then Kuala Lumpur. Ralph Lee of Hong Kong was a member of the youth committee at that time.

Ralph Lee

Young people at the Kuala Lumpur consultation were most unhappy at the authoritarian way the leaders ran the conference. They were not going to be obedient. After inviting the leaders into the hall, they locked the doors and demanded change, saying that the doors would remain locked until there was an agreement to have proper consulta-

tion. The confrontation went on for two or three hours and one American missionary became so distressed he considered jumping from the second-storey window. Finally, the leaders relented and apologised and the conference continued.

The young people were making the point that they wanted to be included in the real decisions of the EACC.

The middle period of our history was a time of great activity. In 1973 the name East Asia Christian Conference was changed to Christian Conference of Asia and the office was centralised in Singapore. Fourteen years later, the Singapore government suddenly closed the office leaving the staff scattered throughout the region. In 1991 they came together again in a new office in Hong Kong. The three general secretaries who led the churches through this time of change were all at the jubilee celebration.

Yap Kim Hao

The 1973 assembly brought significant transition to the life of the churches. The East Asia Christian Conference became the Christian Conference of Asia, which reflected the common understanding of where we were working. Changes took place in the leadership and I negotiated with the Singapore government to have the headquarters established there. After almost fifteen years of decentralised operation, the office was now fully centralised. This gave a closer co-ordination and enabled us to greatly expand the ecumenical programme in Asia.

Sang Jung Park

The decision of the Singapore government to banish CCA from their country was an unexpected event. I was out of the country at the time and came back to have my passport confiscated and unable to return to my office. Over the next period there was little I could do. Local Christian people did not want to know me. But I have always remembered the kindness of a Buddhist friend who had sold me my car when I first went to Singapore. He went out of his way to be helpful, ensuring that I could dispose of my old car and organise my affairs. He

even gave me his Mercedes-Benz car to use while I was sorting things out. He was a true friend. I left Singapore and have not flown Singapore Airlines since.

John V. Samuel

The scattering of the staff after Singapore was a traumatic experience for everyone in CCA and morale was at an all-time low. After I became general secretary my first task was to bring the staff together again as a team. Despite some opposition we explored possibilities and finally decided to go to Hong Kong. The churches in that place were enthusiastic and there were many gains in financial efficiency and ease of travel. It also made us closer to the churches in China. Thanks to the support of many churches we raised the necessary funds and the staff became a team again. I think of it as a kind of experience of our new life in the CCA.

One of the most popular CCA staff was Toshit-sugu Arai of Japan. It seemed everyone knew and liked Tosh. As secretary for education and later associate general secretary he travelled widely in the region.

Tosh did not need to tell a story. His presence at Parapat was itself the story. Suffering from a severe illness, he could barely talk and needed help to walk. But he was determined to attend the CCA celebration and take part in every event. His presence was an inspiration to all present.

The 1970s were not just difficult for CCA but also for the whole Asian church. Many Asian countries were ruled by dictators who were abusing the basic rights of ordinary people—the Marcos family in the Philippines, Park Chung Hee in South Korea, Indira Gandhi in India.

There was political ferment in Taiwan and in most of Southeast Asia. Against this abuse of human rights, many church men and women risked prison and even death in their stand for freedom and justice.

CCA can be proud of the fact that it supported these Christian leaders in their time of persecution. And it became very personal when CCA associate general secretary Harry Daniel was imprisoned in Manila and the youth secretary, Carmencita Karagdag, was forced to go underground to avoid arrest.



Carmencita Karagdag

I was just an ordinary young housewife when I was invited to become the youth secretary of the Christian Conference of Asia. While I was still in Manila, my good friend and colleague Harry Daniel came to the Philippines and had a meal with one of the community workers who was on the most wanted list of President Marcos. I joined them for the meal but the police became aware of the meeting and Harry was subsequently arrested. I was in the kitchen when he was arrested so avoided capture but had to go underground. It was a difficult time trying to work out what action could be taken. Harry's arrest caused an international storm of protest and the CCA sent a high-profile team to meet with President Marcos. In the end Harry was released and

Sang Jung Park

Ron O'Grady and John V. Samuel



During this difficult decade of the 1970s the Urban Rural Mission program of CCA worked directly with social action groups in many Asian countries

I had permission to leave the Philippines. Many of our friends spent the Marcos years in prison and I was able to work for them on the outside.

During this difficult decade the Urban Rural Mission (URM) program of CCA worked directly with social action groups in many Asian countries. Working with the Catholic Church they initiated many programs to assist the poor. Long-serving chair of some of these groups was Malaysian lawyer Victor Oorjitham

Victor Oorjitham

The Urban Rural Mission committee met regularly and often in countries where there were difficult issues. When we met we usually arranged for some of the local people to come and speak to us about their experiences. I especially remember one of these meetings which took place in the Philippines. The woman who came to us was a farmer's wife working with communities in the rural area. With great emotion she told of the way her family were at home having a meal when the door burst open and armed men with balaclavas entered the house. In the presence of the children they brutally shot her husband and walked out. The horror of this event and the cruelty of having children witness the murder of their father made a big impact on us all. Such stories gave strong incentive to URM to continue its work for the poor.

There are many facets to the work of the EACC/CCA. Since its beginnings the leadership has sought to develop a more indigenous and Asian style of Christianity. D.T. Niles actively promoted the publication of the first book of Asian Christian art, which led to the formation of the Asian Christian Art Association. He also promoted and helped edit the first EACC hymnal which was one of the actions leading to the formation of the Asian Institute of Liturgy and Music.

I-to Loh of Taiwan is an ethnomusicologist who has been active in developing Asian music for many years.

I-to Loh

As I moved around Asia I met many remarkable people working with indigenous

music. I recall a special meeting with a man called Justin Ekka, who lives in the Indian city of Ranchi. For some years he worked with All India Radio. This man is a singer and dancer who also plays the violin. At last count he has written more than 4,000 songs in four different languages. We spent the day together and as I was leaving he said that he had written a song for me. Since we had been together all the time I asked how he could have written it for me. And he replied that he had composed it in his head while we were talking to the children. Ekka was a remarkable person. Despite his skills he was a poor man living in humble circumstances. Whatever spare time he had he gave as a volunteer working with blind children. When I remember him, I am reminded of the hymn of Fosdick which describes some people as 'rich in things but poor in soul'. Ekka was the opposite. He was 'poor in things but rich in soul'.

During the years of EACC/CCA many national crises became regional issues. For several years the war in Vietnam dominated Asian thinking. CCA joined with the World Council of Churches in opposing the war and initiated many aid programs to assist in post-war development. Dr Mathews George Chunakara headed the Indochina program of CCA (1996–2000) and is now Asia Secretary of the World Council of Churches. He shared an amusing story of the chaos in post-war Vietnam.

Mathews George Chunakara

Each visit to Indochina was under tight control. On one visit we took a high-profile delegation to meet officials. We had the help of a local pastor who was anxious that we should get to Hanoi and meet with government officials. To do so required a special visa and when we went to apply for it, one of our team realised that he did not have a photograph. 'No photo no visa,' we were told. The others in the team had photos and a colleague from Hong Kong had several. 'Here,' he said, 'have one of mine.' Despite the fact that it looked nothing like him, the official was happy. He had his photo and let him through.

For many years China was closed to the outside and unable to take part in international Christian gatherings. Great changes are now taking place.

Tso Man King

I had been living and working in the United States for twenty-five years but was always concerned for my Chinese homeland. Soon after the pro-democracy movement and confrontation at Tiananmen Square I had the opportunity to visit China and meet the people. In Guangdong province I had my first encounter with the Christian community when I went to a large church in the town. The church had seating for over 1,000 people and all the seats were occupied well in advance. They brought some plain benches in as well and soon we were all jammed up together in the church. What impressed me most was the sense of awe and devotion on the part of the people. They had arrived early and most were silently praying. I left with a great appreciation of the Chinese people but with the big question—how soon will there be complete religious freedom?

There are still many more stories to be told. Let me give you one final one from my own experience in the CCA.

In the late 1970s the general secretary of the Korean Council of Churches, Rev. Kim Kwan Suk, was imprisoned for subversion. As associate general secretary of the CCA I was making many trips to Korea during that time to support him and some others who opposed the tyranny of President Park Chung Hee. Landing in Seoul friends told me that Kim Kwan Suk was unexpectedly being released that very day and was looking forward to seeing me. I went straight to his home where he had only just arrived. It was a hugely emotional meeting with both of us weeping at the joy and wonder of his release.

We talked for a while about his experiences. It had been a hard time for this gentle man. Korean prison cells in those years were primitive and cruel. Kwan Suk was allowed only one book in the prison so naturally he took a copy of the Bible. He said that he survived in the cell by treating his time there as a religious retreat at which he had daily readings, periods of silence, prayers and hymns. And then he said some words which I have never forgotten. 'And sometimes,' he said, 'sometimes I would dance.'

I leave you with this image of a senior Christian leader quietly dancing in a prison cell as the symbol of the unquenchable spirit of Asian Christianity.

What Next?

What will be the direction of the CCA in the coming years?

On 9 March 2007, the last day of the two-day general committee meeting of the Christian Conference of Asia held at Medan, Indonesia, members were united in expressing gratefulness to the Indonesian churches for their generous hospitality and their very able and systematic organising and hosting of the fiftieth anniversary events in Parapat, in Pematang Siantar and in Medan.

The fact that all the churches in Indonesia (including CCA member churches as well as those that are not) had come together to host the activities from 4 to 7 March is a concrete sign of the unity that is already there in Christ Jesus, our common Saviour.

The kind support of state officials, including the presence of Muslim brothers and sisters to greet during some parts of the events, was also a concrete sign of the wider unity that we are all called to live out as we get engaged in 'building communities of peace for all', the theme of the CCA in the years 2006–2010.

However, the committee members expressed sympathy for the loved ones of the victims of the two calamities that had happened (an earthquake and a plane crash) during the time of the anniversary celebration.

These sad incidents in the life of Indonesian people heightened the concern for environmental sustainability in Asia, a visible sign of commitment being made not only through discussions at the international symposium and speeches during the other events, but most especially in the tree-planting activity at the government-given land in Parapat, which is now the CCA garden.

In a speech to a crowd of around 150,000 people gathered at the Teladan Stadium in Medan on 7 March, Dr Prawate Khid-arn, the general secretary of CCA, described the fiftieth anniversary as not merely a time to celebrate, but also to 'thank God for accompanying us right through the past fifty

years. We have also come to seek God's forgiveness for our lack of courage to witness and to take a stand for justice and peace amidst the challenging realities and to renew commitment to become ambassadors of Jesus Christ to transform the principalities and powers of this world that kill the innocent, deny food, shelter, education and security to the majority of our people and who abuse God's creation.'

Speeches of the early ecumenical pioneers who conceived the Christian Conference of Asia (then the East Asia Christian Conference) in Parapat in 1957 recalled the challenges that went with the movement for genuine independence from colonisation and imperialism among the countries in Asia. The ecumenical movement was born as a concrete sign of the Asian people's determination to uphold their freedom and dignity and to live out their being a witnessing community, called to witness to the reconciling power of Christ.

What will happen next? What will be the direction of the CCA in the coming years?

Having heard the stories, paper presentations, scripture studies, and dialogues and conversations, the following were offered as recommendations summarised by a listening team at the international symposium and which were heard by the General Committee at its meeting on 8 March in Medan.

CCA needs to strengthen links with member churches and councils

- The ecumenical movement must be rooted in the local congregations.
- There must be improved information sharing (to build trust, friendship and ownership) through better communication methods, translations of publications etc.
- There must be visits to churches and councils.
- For CCA activities to have an impact on the lives of people—resulting in trust building, friendship and ownership—there must be needs analysis for programs.
- Opportunities to host/own CCA programs will result from the trust and friendship that are built.

- There must be sustained leadership development in member churches and councils.

CCA needs to explore relationships beyond the member churches and councils

The plurality in Asia calls for a wider ecumenism, i.e. for unlimited relationships.

- This means expanding or reviving the geographical membership (e.g. churches in China and Singapore could be brought in or welcomed back to CCA).
- This means fostering intrafaith dialogue with Catholic, Evangelical, Pentecostal and charismatic churches.
- This also means promoting interfaith dialogue among the different peoples of faiths in Asia.

CCA must explore the emerging missiological/theological issues of the present time

- This includes listening to the CCA story from the perspective of the underside/marginalised (not only the winner's side).
- This includes identifying present empires (e.g. colonialism and neo-colonialism) that usurp the freedom and dignity of the peoples in Asia.
- This includes clarifying relationships between mission, evangelism and witness and CCA's missiological role.
- This includes affirming CCA's role in intervention and advocacy, especially in challenging difficulties of calamities, injustice and oppression.
- This also includes promoting environmental sustainability.

Rerouting Mission and Ecumenism in Asia

The jubilee viewed from a people's perspective

The celebration of fifty years of CCA is an occasion to thank God for Christian witness in Asia. It is also a *kairos* for the churches and the ecumenical communities in Asia to look back and to discern the prophetic task in the future. To commemorate the jubilee celebration of CCA and to give a new perspective on mission and ecumenical practice at this moment in history when Asia is bleeding and life—both human and nature—is under constant threat by the global market and the Empire, FMU-URM brought together twenty-two church leaders, URM grassroots-level workers and theological educators, at Sibolangit, North Sumatera, Indonesia, to complement the occasion of the jubilee with reflections from the perspective of people in struggle and pain. This was the culmination of the fifteen-month long subregional study process among peoples in south, southeast and northeast Asia on rerouting mission and ecumenism.

Unlike the three previous study processes, there were few presentations during the consultation. There were three Bible reflections, led by Rev. Mindawati Peranginangin (1 Corinthians 1:26–31), Tso Man King (2 Kings 5) and Rev. Josef Widyatmadja (Mark 6:30–44) respectively. Wati Longchar gave a summary of the theological reflection on rerouting mission. Rev. Dr Rienzie Perera spoke on the partnership, resources sharing and future of ecumenical movement. Lesley Capus spoke on ecumenism from a youth perspective, and Dr Evangeline Rajkumar spoke from the women's perspective. M.P. Joseph drew the attention to 'Rerouting Mission and Ecumenism in the Context of Empire'.

At the end of the consultation, the participants issued a 'Jubilee Declaration on Rerouting Mission and Ecumenism in Asia'. The declaration calls CCA to the following actions:

- To set up an independent and autonomous 'study commission', with partners in Latin America and Africa, on the impact of the

changing empire-centric geopolitical scenario. Such a commission could also help in discovering forgotten and alternate histories and stories of people.

- To discover the heritage of dialogue and common praxis between peoples of religious and other traditions, affirming the integrity of creation, to unearth the potential of the spirit of conviviality issuing forth in the invitation to celebrate the feast of life as the culture and ethos of Asian ecumenism.
- To address theological education and ministerial formation with a view to forming persons who will nurture communities of faith.
- To initiate a consultative process on 'people's resource in Asia', which will on the one hand help rediscover the immense potential available among peoples, communities and local institutions, and on the other reduce dependence on resources that are not sensitive to Asian realities and priorities.



- To invest in developing leadership through conscious recognition and involvement of the potential available with student, youth and women movements within and outside the ecumenical fraternity ensuring relevant and youthful leadership.
- To renew the commitment to produce literature—books and manuals—that will articulate faith responses in the context of organising communities and keeping them relevant and updated.
- To affirm people's movement, both within and beyond the ecumenical family, and to stand in solidarity with all such initiatives that are similar to that which the church professes in building communities of peace for all.
- To help the churches, ecumenical bodies and people's movement to reflect critically on the upcoming centenary of the International Mission Conference (2010) and in so

doing find new direction for ecumenical mission engagement in Asia. CCA is urged to facilitate a Mission Conference in Asia in the context of Rerouting Mission and Ecumenism in Asia.

During the plenary discussion and presentation, the participants resolved to pursue the following matters for future activities:

- Continuation of URM work within CCA structure.
- Follow up of the study on Rerouting Mission and Ecumenism in Asia. The members felt the importance of documenting the work and publishing papers for wider theological reflection and discussion.
- 2010 Mission Conference—The participants felt the need for holding a major mission conference in Asia in 2010 to provide a new direction in doing mission in Asia.

—Josef Widyatmadja and Wati Longchar

Jubilee Youth Forum

Be humble, be gentle in love, be united for peace (Ephesians 4:2–3)

A youth forum brought young people to Parapat, Indonesia, on 3–7 March 2007 in conjunction with the fiftieth anniversary celebration of CCA. The forum provided a platform for thirty-eight youth leaders from across Asia (Korea, Myanmar, India, Cambodia, Hong Kong, the Philippines and Indonesia) to share their concerns and issues that influence life and ministry and reaffirm the importance of youth participation in the life of the CCA.

The objectives of the youth forum were:

- To share youth concerns and witness at the CCA fiftieth anniversary celebration.
- To provide a common platform for youth leaders across Asia to discern issues concerning them and responses to such issues.
- To attempt to make CCA more focused on youth leadership development and empowerment within the churches in Asia.
- To develop the future leadership of the ecumenical movement and the churches in Asia.

The participants shared their concerns on the opportunities and challenges faced by youth in their churches and countries. They discussed how to engage active youth participation in the ecumenical movement in Asia. It was felt that the cooperation and networking between the youth at the local churches and those coordinating at the national level should be given much importance.

They discussed the growing unemployment situation, the growth in consumerist culture and unethical values among youth as impacts of globalisation. Youth are also becoming vulnerable to conflict, violations of human rights, militarisation, gender injustice and oppression in the name of groups, classes, religions and castes. The young people raised two prominent questions in the wider discussion on ecumenism.

- Is ecumenism interesting to youth? Why are young people losing ground in ecumenism?



- Why do churches not allow sufficient participation of youth in leadership roles?

The new challenge for youth at this present time is: 'Don't wait until an opportunity is at our doorstep.' If they wait, they may never get an opportunity. Youth have to raise their voices and let the church know what they need. The youth are the leaders for today not for future.

New challenges for youth are:

- That ecumenism be made challengingly relevant and contextual to the local congregations in Asia.
- That youth be given more exposures to the realities of life to gain more holistic understanding and experiences of ecumenism.
- That ecumenism be taught in the Christian education curriculum as part of ecumenical nurture.
- That ecumenism be grounded in interfaith peacebuilding processes, initiated by local youth groups and that youth be encouraged to participate in the festivals of our sisters and brothers from other faiths.
- That the church needs to grow in the faith, resisting and stopping church divisions and splits from within.
- That youth be not used as decorative ornaments on committees but be given equal participation, their voices and perspectives listened to in decision-making bodies in the church. Youth should be treated as partners and not as a threat to church leadership.
- That the senior leadership in the church promote youth leadership with a sustain-

able commitment and responsibility.

- That youth become bold and courageous in resisting unjust systems in the church and strive for a corrupt-free church and society.
- That capacity building be made to create youth entrepreneurship and to make young people self-reliant through necessary skills to stand against the forces of globalisation.
- That churches get rid of their armchair mentality and strengthen young people to become agents in transforming society.
- That the agenda for the ecumenical movement be designed from local churches and not be imported from top to bottom.
- That youth reaffirm the importance of the implementation of the Youth Statement from CCA's pre-assembly youth forum in 2005 and urge churches to seriously commit to it.

'If today's children are tomorrow's citizens, today's youth are only for today,' is a well-known maxim. Therefore it is high time for CCA to take up the cause of young people and work for their empowerment to bring awareness to become better responsible citizens of their countries. The young people urge churches and their leaders to start implementing ecumenism in local congregations.

They are hopeful that the church leadership will take youth issues seriously and try to promote young leaders for the church and society. They hope that the discussions at the youth forum will reaffirm the vision, mission, and commitment of youth for the cause of ecumenism.

—Samnang Douk

Young people at CCA's
jubilee celebrations in
Parapat

New Perspectives

Teachers and pastors' training in Cambodia

'We were never taught to read the Bible this way. Now I understand what it means to read the Bible in the context of contemporary realities'

The leadership of the churches in Cambodia largely depends on theological education by extension and short-term leadership training programs conducted by various organisations. Most of the pastors have no formal theological training, with very little awareness of contemporary issues and realities. Many of them are not exposed to new trends in theology, new ways of reading the Bible and ecumenical formation.

Recognising this, CCA-FMU decided to train sixty ecumenical enablers in Cambodia on Asian contextual theologies. As a follow-up to last year's training program, another training program was conducted on 19–24 March 2007 in Phnom Penh. Thirty church leaders, including one evangelist from Singapore who is based in Cambodia, attended the program.

The course was designed to train participants in effective preaching, worship, leadership, holistic and contextual reading of the Bible in the context of economic injustice, globalisation, environmental degradation, HIV/AIDS and multireligious and gender inequalities.

The teachers were Dr Gaikwad Roger, Director of Theological Education by Extension of the Senate of Serampore College, Dr Donald Messer, Director of Church and Global AIDS, Dr Hope S. Antone and Dr Wati Longchar.

For most of the participants this training was the first of its kind.

One participant said, 'We were never taught to read the Bible this way. Now I understand what it means to read the Bible in the context of contemporary realities. I feel very inadequate to preach after listening to our teachers. I realise that I need more formal training.'

Another participant said, 'This kind of training program should be organised in the provinces. All pastors should have a chance to attend such a training program. We see hope for Cambodia if we preach from the Bible in the way our teachers taught us.'

A participant whose family has been affected by HIV/AIDS said that a separate training program needs to be organised on 'reading the Bible

in the context of HIV/AIDS' to help pastors understand the virus and minister to them. Pastors have a crucial role to play in the community and we thank the teachers for helping us to understand how to create a healthy community. We have become more sensitive. But we need more worship materials.'

A woman participant also expressed the need for a separate training program on reading the Bible from women's perspective. She said, 'This will help men and women understand the various forms of cultural discrimination and change their attitude towards women and thereby become agents of transformation.'

All the participants expressed their full satisfaction of the relevance of the themes dealt with at the training and that these would enhance their leadership ability, especially in the preaching ministry.

During the evaluation the participants suggested the following:

- That contextual reading of the Bible, feminist theology, HIV/AIDS and interreligious issues should be continued. Focus should be given on reading the Bible relating to those issues.
- That the next training program include issues such as church administration, resource mobilisation, finance management, effective leadership and worship planning, peace and reconciliation, practical evangelism and community building.
- That evening hours (after dinner) be set aside to practise preaching relating to contemporary problems and challenges. The participants may be informed ahead of the time to come prepared. After the preaching, evaluation may be done for improvement.

We are delighted that the training was able to create interest and deeper commitment in the ministry. We thank KCC leaders for their hard work in organising the program and the United Board for Higher Christian Education and the Church and Global AIDS in the United States for their financial support.

—A. Wati Longchar

New Staff

Two new executive personnel to join CCA

Freddy De Alwis

Rev. Freddy De Alwis has been appointed as CCA's new Joint Executive Secretary for Justice, International Affairs, Development and Service, commencing 1 May 2007.

Rev. Alwis has a bachelor's degree in theology from Serampore University and a postgraduate diploma in social development from St Francis Xavier University, Canada. His association with the National Christian Council of Sri Lanka (NCCSL) extends over six years. He served in the capacity of executive secretary for the Mission and Evangelism Committee from 1994 to 1996 and the executive secretary for the Development Commission from 1996 to 2000. He has been involved as Baptist minister attached to Sri Lanka Baptist Sangamaya from 1988 until recently.

In his last assignment as a director of RASDA (Relief and Social Development Arm) of Sri Lanka Baptist Sangamaya during 2004–2006, he was extensively involved in the relief and rehabilitation work in the Tsunami-affected areas as well as in other war-hit areas in the northeastern part of the country. He was instrumental in commencing a village development society among Baptist village beneficiaries.

Rev. Alwis, an advocate for peace, has initiated peace symposiums in every district in Sri Lanka. Interethnic and interreligious grassroots' approaches to peace building in Sri Lanka is important to him.

Rev. Alwis is married to Ms Deepa Anurangani De Alwis. They have a son, Miyuru Deshan, and a daughter, Dakshika.



Moumita Biswas

Ms Moumita Biswas has been appointed as CCA's Joint Executive Secretary for Ecumenical Formation, Gender Justice and Youth Empowerment, commencing 1 June 2007.

Moumita served as executive secretary for the All India Council of Christian Women, the women's wing of the National Council of Churches in India, and was also their first woman mission and evangelism secretary. Prior to that she worked as women's desk program secretary of the Ecumenical Christian Centre in Bangalore.

Moumita hails from Kolkata and is a member of the Church of North India. She graduated in political science with honours from St Xavier's College, Kolkata, and did theological training at Bishops College, Kolkata. She completed a master's degree in theology and women studies from Pittsburg Theological Seminary in the USA, and studied at the graduate school of the Ecumenical Institute in Bossey, Geneva.

Moumita was actively engaged in the Student Christian Movement and trained at the Diakonia Training Centre in Yong Dung Po, Seoul, South Korea. She is passionately involved in the ecumenical pilgrimage in promoting the grassroots ecumenical women's movement. Being a feminist South Asian theologian she is involved in discovering new feminist contextual hermeneutics of re-reading the Bible, inclusive mission paradigms and weaving liturgies.

She is married to Prashant Bhonsle, who works as program associate of the Synodical Board of Social Service of the Church of North India.

Help for the Philippines

NCCP general secretary calls for more solidarity from sister churches and councils

Sharon Rose Joy Ruiz-Duremdes is general secretary of the National Council of Churches in the Philippines. A member of the CCA General Committee, Sharon has just returned from a series of visits to Canada and the United States of America as part of a nine-member ecumenical delegation from the Philippines to create awareness among churches and state officials regarding the extrajudicial killings happening in her country.

Another killing took place on 9 March, bringing the total number of deaths since January 2001 to 836. In 2006, there were 207 extrajudicial killings, or an average of four people a week. Victims are reportedly being killed for their political beliefs, exercising freedom of expression and opting to serve others as Christians. They include church leaders, lawyers, human rights defenders, journalists, local officials, community leaders, students, peasants, indigenous leaders, workers, professionals, women and children.

As well as meeting with churches, the delegation met senators and representatives to issue a wakeup call to the US Congress and the White House to stop sending money to the Philippine government, which is implicated in human rights abuses.

Two members of the delegation served as witnesses during the hearing before the US Senate Committee on Foreign Relations on 14 March, chaired by Senator Barbara Boxer. They were Bishop Eliezer Pascua, general secretary of the United Church of Christ in the Philippines, and Marie Hilao-Enriquez, general secretary of the human rights alliance, Karapatan. They also had a briefing with staff of the House Committee on Foreign Affairs headed by Rep. Tom Lantos.

Other delegation members were United Methodist Bishop Solito Toquero, Fr Jose P. Dizon of the Workers Assistance Centre, Rev. Deogracias Iniguez, Roman Catholic bishop of the Diocese of Kalookan, Edre Olalia of the Counsels for the Defense of Liberties, Athea Peñalosa, representing the Children's Rehabilitation Centre, and Amirah Ali Lidasan, secretary general and co-founder of the Moro-Christian People's Alliance.



'When we perceive ourselves in the CCA as a family, it is important that other churches become aware, conversant and concerned about what is happening in the Philippines and lift up our issues through prayer and solidarity.'

Another Philippine delegation went on to the United Nations in Geneva to present a report, 'Let the Stones Cry Out: An Ecumenical Report on Human Rights in the Philippines and a Call to Action', produced by the NCCP. The report details cases of political killings and links these to the Arroyo government's counterinsurgency program. 'The manner with which the victims were executed or abducted was done professionally and systematically, establishing a connection between the national security strategy and the incidents of violations,' it states.

Sharon expressed concern that during the campaign period until the forthcoming election on 14 May more violence could happen in the Philippines. The NCCP is now conducting voters' education seminars for churches and faith communities in order to help them understand the election, safeguard the sanctity of the process, and be equipped to make an informed decision. NCCP is also part of the Contra-Daya, an antifraud monitoring body that will monitor the election.

Asked what she would like to say to CCA member churches and councils, Sharon Rose Joy Ruiz-Duremdes said, 'Since Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo would rather listen to voices outside than within the country, since she is more concerned about her international image, it would be good for councils of churches and churches in Asia that have the means to send delegations during the election time to be a presence.' This for her is real solidarity in this time of crisis in the Philippines.

—Hope S. Antone

Ordination

Dr Ahn Jae Woong, former general secretary of CCA, a well-known Asian ecumenical leader and member of the Presbyterian Church of Korea (PCK), was ordained a pastor on 3 March.

The ordination, held at the Ewha Women's University Church in Seoul, Korea, was attended by many of his friends and wellwishers, and was conducted by, among others, Professor Meerah Hahn and Dr David Kwang-sun Suh.

PCK currently has the largest membership of any Presbyterian denomination in the world.

Ahn Jae Woong said, 'Although the ordination has come late in my career, the call is unavoidable.'

Ahn did his theological studies at the Presbyterian College and Theological Seminary in Seoul, at Harvard University and Emory University in the USA.

The Mary Holmes College in the USA awarded him the degree of Doctor of Humane Letters, *honoris causa*, in 1993.

He has held several important ecumenical positions in the Asia Pacific region. He was a former regional secretary of the World Student Christian Federation Asia Pacific Region and provided leadership to a host of young people in the region and promoted and guided them into ecumenical work.

The newly ordained pastor is currently director of the Korean Foundation for Working Together, a Seoul-based NGO, which helps find jobs to Koreans belonging to less privileged sections of the society.

He is also a visiting professor at the Hoseo University in Seoul.

Leadership

The Batak Christian Community Church (GPKB) in Indonesia held its synod in January in Cisarua-Bogor and elected its new leadership:

- Ephorus/bishop: Rev. Manahan Syarif Simanjuntak, STH
- General secretary: Rev. Pitonggam Lum-bantobing, STH
- Treasurer: IR. Arnest Sinaga

Celebrating the Legacy, Visioning the Future, Living the Jubilee



The anniversary book of the Fellowship of the Least Coin
Compiled and edited by Esther Byu and Susan Jackson Dowd
and designed by Laura Lee

The Fellowship of the Least Coin anniversary book is a collection of stories, testimonies, photos and images of the founding mothers, leaders and projects supported by least coins, with a purpose to witness to and to celebrate the wonders whereby God uses and multiplies faithful prayers offered with a symbol of love, 'the least coin', as a channel to restore justice, peace and reconciliation in individual lives as well as in communities.

The profound stories and testimonies from the projects provide an understanding that to be in solidarity with struggling and suffering people can empower all to dream dreams and to envision a safer community and better world, where everyone can experience and enjoy fullness of life, living in peace, in justice and in equality. Such dreams and visions can arise even in a desperate or seemingly impossible and hopeless situation.

To live in the present reality—in solidarity and in compassion with the least, the suffering and the oppressed—teaches us to live the life of jubilee that Jesus Christ proclaimed, embodied and fulfilled in his life and ministry.

The anniversary book is an invaluable resource for individuals, women's groups and centres, theological institutes and libraries.

The cost is US\$10 in the USA and Canada, and US\$8 in other parts of the world.

For information and orders, contact Esther Byu, Executive Secretary, IC-FLC, c/o Women's Desk, Church of Christ in Thailand, 328 Phaya-thai Road, Rachathewi, Bangkok 10400, Thailand (telephone/fax 662-214-6027, email: icflc@loxinfo.co.th).

The Joy and Struggle of Asia

I. Our ancestors narrated

Once in an era
Asia was a stunning continent
Abounding with natural resources
Living in a civilised society
Conserved nature ...
Harmonious social relations
Having a deep religious understanding
The pride of everyone.

II. Yet our ancestors narrated also

Asia had gone through a dark era
When kings vied with each other for power
The people were their victims
Men dominated social relations
Slavery was prevalent
Lack of knowledge dominated
And Asia ... was conquered and colonised as a result
Its wealth and prosperity were plundered, the people
enslaved ...
Then ... our ancestors battled against the colonialists
and repelled them
Their offspring relished it.
You and me ...

III. But not long after

New colonisation has come repeatedly, in various
forms, till now ...
God wills the liberation of Asia
From the powers that takes life
Imprisoning
Fooling
Enslaving the people
From the powers that discriminate
Cause poverty, injustice
From the development process that does not sustain
the environment
From the spirits in the era of globalisation
That cause people to be too individualistic
Trading children and women
Squeezing the labourers inhumane
Using all means, yet inhumane
Causing the weak to be weaker, and laid down breath-
less
Increasing the number of unemployed
Weakening the farmers with small capital
Allowing HIV and AIDS to spread freely
Asia is filled with evil and corruption that is rooted in
all fields of work
Efforts to defend the dignity of the people are chal-
lenged by the power of those with weapons
Efforts for democratisation are still blocked by authori-
tarian forces
Who quietly and openly work concertedly with those
with big capital
As a result, the relation between one another becomes
prone to various conflicts ...

IV. Why do we choose to remain silent, be unaware, have no concern, ignorant, while we know that in Jesus God has freed us from all power of the invisible and visible spirits? Why ... ?

This poem by Nova Alemina Manik, originally in Bahasa Indonesia, was read during the jubilee worship at the Teladan Stadium in Medan,