



CHRISTIAN CONFERENCE OF ASIA

ASIAN ECUMENICAL YOUTH ASSEMBLY

MANADO, INDONESIA

AEYA discusses on challenges to spirituality in a digitalized world and responses of Asian youths

he third thematic session of the Asian Ecumenical Youth Assembly (AEYA), titled 'Spirituality in a Digitalized World: Responses of Asian Youths,' touched a chord among

"We live in an era of increasingly pervasive digital technology. This is embedded deeply in the way we do things - in our church, ministry, work, organizations and even in our daily lives. These pervasive digital in-

direct consequence of this is the rise of digital activism, which further decrease human interaction and sense of community," he said.

"Churches around the world have started to invest more in reaching out to youngsters via social media and that has proved to be effective. But what it has also done is influence our understanding of Jesus Christ's ministry as something limited only to virtual reflections, inspirational YouTube videos and blogging," opined Ismael.

"When Jesus commissioned his disciples to 'go and make disciples of all nations,' he was not constructively telling them to tweet about it or post something about him in their social media statuses. He literally intended them to go 'physically' to live and commune with the people, identify themselves with them and be one with them in their sufferings and struggles."

"Our present realities call for us young people to get out of the com-

society to be their beacon of hope and light," he said.

"Our church has always emphasized that spirituality shall liberate human beings. It must lead us to live a life of dignity and fullness. To promote spirituality is to embrace practices, trends and systems that we perceive to be of relevance to our existence and everyday lives as human beings. But this should never be abused and used to diminish our sense of spirituality, and never be at the stake of human dignity."

Manna Prasad, a digital media expert who works for broadcasting and online digital media publications in India's digital communication epicenter known as the Silicon Valley, Bangalore, spoke about an alarming aspect of the proliferation of digital media in our lives by highlighting the 'rise of virtual churches.'

"In countries like the USA, studies have revealed that fewer people are going to churches as they are busy logging on to the internet. Some



hundreds of young Asians who were in attendance.

Two young Christian leaders — Ismael Fisco Jr. and Manna Prasad —from the Philippines and India, kept the audience engaged in deep deliberations with their speeches and responses during a lively session addressing digitalized world and its impact.

The common thread between the two presentations was how digital media was becoming increasingly influential in the lives of Asian youth, often negating the values of spirituality.

Ismael, a digital media company's operational director noted advances of digital technology in maximizing the ministry and programs of the church and how it affects many areas of life. However, he also proposed that technology is not without negative implications especially in the understanding of youth's spirituality.

novations are radically changing not only our approach of doing mission but our very understanding of spirituality and our reason-for-being as a church."

He said that today's generation are now called the Generation C (for "connectedness") having the strong desire to be connected and present online. He said that digital technology has reached an 'inflection point' reaching into every corner of young people's lives.

"We spend unbelievable hours browsing online and playing with our gadgets, leading to shorter attention spans, information overload and anxiety among people. It has also led to increase in cases of cyberbullying, human trafficking and oppression of certain sectors of society.

"Fake news, which was a term which we had not heard a few years ago, is all too common now. Private and political entities use it to propagate hate, prejudice and anger. A



forts of our churches to be present on the streets, in the margins, in wartorn communities, with the sinful and the most unloved sectors of our shun going to church under the pretext that they can access church

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Young Asians must look at changing family values

on a session on "Chang-

hree panelists speaking heavy burden on the shoulders of women..

ing Family Values and She also tackled contemporary Cultures in Asia: Inter- issues: "karoshi" (deaths related generational Voices," echoed the to overwork), the Japanese Agenda same concern that traditional fam- that wants to increase women in

population will grow by 22 percent in East Asia, posing an imminent ple. If we miss this one, we will do labor force issue. Politics in these parts also cannot be ignored.

Through it all, the centrality of family is undeniably unchanged in Asia, said Dr. Henriette Hutabarat Lebang, General Chairperson of

family itself has changed in Japan. A typical family today in Japan is like this: They are a dual-career



the Communion of Churches in Indonesia. "Family is still very deep in our culture as Asians."

character of Asian cultures. Show- share new ideas, how we share ing some examples from Indone- our time. Given all the problems, sia, she said Asians are also very we must revive ourselves in faith. community-oriented, practice in- Schedule time to create happiness tergenerational cohabitation, val- - affirm and share time with one ue extended families, respect older people and see a mutual respon-

differences, family ties, for examthe mistake of many parts of the world."

"Are we disposable?" Dr. Fujiwara asked, pleading for reforms in family values and work culture in Japan. She said she herself experienced overwork and severe depression at 22; and uses that experience to enrich her ministry now.

Lawrence Chong proposed some ways to respond to the changing character and needs of young people today. Among others, he said, parents must increase their engagement with their kids, find "new ways to love" and appreciate the new way of family. "If you do not engage the child, you lose the child," he said.

"Parents nowadays are under stress, under a lot of pressure," he added. "In my case, we have a cell She said family is an enduring group of new families, where we another.

Traditional power structures are



ily values nurtured over the center the workforce as a matter of monturies in Asia have changed and ey, not good faith, from "powerful nucler family system totally disappearing from many countries in Asia.

changed in Japan, said Dr. Sawako same kind of change is happening Fujiwara. "A typical family today in families across Asia. He zeroed in Japan is like this: They are a in on some changes in the family dual-career couple. Harassments landscape. against working mothers, single parents and pregnant women exist. They don't live together with their parents or relatives, they are always looking for a nursery school for their children. And today, it's unbelievably difficult."

Fujiwara, a full-time lecturer and University chaplain at Tohoku Gakuin University is also a feminist theologian. She said that the Japanese context altogether puts a

male elites."

Lawrence Chong, a member of the Roman Catholic Church's Fo-The image of a family itself has ckalarie Movement said about the

> In 10 years, he said, traditional families will make up less than 50 percent of Asian countries. Year 2018 is forecast to see over 50 percent of Asia-Pacific's population in urban areas; resulting in soaring prices for housing. Health costs will be a burden in Asia because of cancer, stroke and dementia in the next decade.

He also cited a study saying that between 2015 and 2034, the older



sibility for the care of parents and also bound to change because of children.

ed or changed?" she then asked, Women are increasingly accessing explaining that the impact of glo- information, quality education. balization on Asia was a cause to Some places in Asia are moving. It reexamine long-held assumptions is a complex situation, but ... Asia is on Asian culture.

"The market economy has introa shifting of value in Asian society," she said. Thus, people have been increasingly individualistic, exclusivist, greedy and marginalizing. "Children are treated as an in-Face-to-face communication has vestment," she said. "I think we taken a backseat because of technology.

we need to hold this: Respecting Dr. Lebang. (KOKO ALVIAR)

the cultural landscape, said Chong. "Are we still community-orient- "Gender equality has to happen." really moving."

Dr. Lebang said that problematduced high competition ... There is ic realities must be criticized. She cited the case of parents marrying off their children to rich men and sending them off to work abroad.

shouldn't close our eyes to that kind of reality, even migrant work-Amid all these we must hold on ers today... Parents don't know the to some of our values, she said. "We implication of their daughter workstill have some positive values and ing at someone else's homes," said



Biblical Reflection: Living Together in Peace and Harmony

The peaceful world

describes an amicable living

between Strong and Weak.

The peaceful world is not a

world where the Weak and

Strong just live together, but

hereafter the Weak no lon-

ger becomes the prey of the

strong, which means that

the weak would be liberated

from the violence. 99

he wolf will live with the lamb, and the leopard will lie down with the young goat; the calf and the young lion will feed together, and a little child will lead them. The cow and the bear will graze. Their young will lie down together, and a lion will eat straw like anox. A nursing child will play over the snake's hole; toddlers will reach right over the serpent's den. They won't harm or destroy anywhere on my holy mountain. The earth will surely be filled with the knowledge of the Lord, just as the water covers the sea. (Isaiah 11:6-9)

This passage refers to recovering the original sprit of the created world, in which humans, animals and all living beings have an equal relationship in harmony. In fact, naturally, the wolf preys upon the lamb, the leopard preys upon the young goat, and the lion preys upon the calf and child; the cow, the bear, the lion and the ox cannot live together; the nursing child cannot play over the snake's hole.

As we can see, many countries of Asia were ruled by imperials. These empires created unfair relationships between the empire and many Asian countries which were controlled from the core. Control means military occupation or other formal political intervention, but it can also include informal economic or cultural influence. Religion, ideology or other cultural forces have accompanied political or economic persuasion.

From BC 1244-612, the power of the Assyrian crisis by the Empire. The Assyrian Empire heavily

taxed the occupied territories, plundered them, and acted cruelly to frighten the inhabitants. They also had scattered Israelites to other countries, mixing them, and destroying their national spirit. But the Empire failed in the previous chapter of today's scripture. In the meantime, Israelites wanted to be able to unify the Israel into the kingdom of Messiah and reconcile them.

But our scripture says that the kingdom of Messiah will be filled with peace. The peaceful world describes an amicable living between Strong and Weak. Here antagonism, either systemic

or natural, will undergo redemption. The peaceful world is not a world where the Weak and Strong just live together, but hereafter the Weak no longer becomes the prey of the strong, which means that the weak would be liberated from the violence.

In Hebrew, shalom is a word of a total peace which means completeness, wholeness, well-being and harmony. Shalom can only come from God who created this world and sent the Son into this world to fulfill true love. It is shalom that makes us all one in the Lord. It is shalom established by the shedding of Christ's blood and the giving of his spirit. It is shalom that has already come but it is not yet fully here.



In Korea, we have a word "Sangsaeng." Sangsaeng is defined as living together, helping each other, which means life-sharing. Sangsaeng refers to working for the well-being of others; its goal is saving life. Sangsaeng focuses on mutual relationships in which one cannot exist without the other; they Empire was tremendous so that Israelites were in are essentially united. Such mutual relationships result in harmony. It can be connected that the

> practice of justice and love leads to co-existence. In the creation, the world was in harmony without any divisions and conflicts.

> However, today we are faced the life-killing civilization, manifested in economic injustice, ecological destruction, the threat of Empire, and the religious conflicts. This compels us to urgently explore the possibility of life-giving civilization which affirms relationships, coexistence, harmony with creation, and solidar-

ity with those who struggle for justice.

Living in the era of new capitalism, we stand in the social structure and the economic situation easy to lose the knowledge of the Lord. But Jesus Christ invites us to reimage the world to undo the atrocity and arrogance.

We are all God's creation. Please remember that we are the precious God's creation, a salt and a light of Asia, and a member of the ecumenical leaders now and in the future. Therefore, we should cooperate, recognizing the social structural crisis and realizing true peace, in truth and light of the Lord so that justice can be realized in our Asia context and in our daily lives.

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services and prayers on mobile applications. There is a real false sense of being comfortable with the 'cyber-church," she said.

She strongly emphasized that 'technology cannot replace human emotions' by showing a short video clip about a crying child and his frustrated parents, who are in different places and communicating via a mobile video call. While nothing online can stop the child's cry, his father taking him in his arms immediately does so, a human touch making all the difference.

She extolled AEYA's participants to be change-makers by satisfying four conditions.

"Be a change maker by being faith-bearers, God-seekers, risk-takers and gospel-sharers at places that we are planted," she said.

She felt churches around the world had a duty to pass on its sacred teachings and heritage to youngsters in a language they understood.

"The Church must not hesitate in passing on its sacred heritage to young people of our age. It can meet young people where they are and entice them with the message of Christ as well as the teachings of the Church through a new way of delivery," she said.

"But having said that, technology in itself will not make one `` any more spiritual. It is a tool that will help and enhance you on your spiritual journey. One should understand that digital technology is not passive. It has somewhat become an extension of our life."

However, she touched upon one incessant danger of social media which many young people tended to ignore.

"Political parties, cult leaders and spiritual gurus tend to spew out propaganda incessantly. Most people lap it up without discernment and as a result, ruin their life and soul. Most information you find online need not have the right essence. The digitalized world probably won't help you with such discernment," she said.

Manna was of the opinion that the digital world made young people think less and hence, they needed spiritual guidance.

"In the digital age, information is available at our fingertips. So, there is very less of believing and more of knowing. But what we really need at this point is a spiritual direction, spiritual mentorship, spiritual programming and small faith-sharing groups.

"Despite all challenges of technology, there are still a number of unique opportunities presented by the modern age of digital lifestyles. The spiritual needs of the youths should be met in a digitized way," she said.

Both of the speakers encouraged the AEYA participants to be critical and responsible in using and consuming technology and to be on guard on how it affects their sense of spirituality. (AJU GEORGE CHRIS)

Youths in action...



Bishop Dr. S.A.E Nababan listens to one of the Youths in Dialogues Group Discussion.



Various panelists display mementos presented to them by AEYA's Local Organising Committee.







Participants hold their mobile phone torches high as they pray for Daniela di Mauro, who recently passed away.

Photos by: Jeba Singh Samuvel

Youths in discussion





Young people have increasingly deviated from the 8-5 work cycle. This group is discussing the prosand cons.



THE IMPORTANCE OF EDUCATION
Is consumerism creeping into education systems? This group tries to answer that question.

HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

Are businesses preferring machines over people? This group discusses.



POOR PEOPLE, RICH PEOPLE
Inclusive development has been a hot topic in the Asia-Pacific region. Can we do anything about this issue or is it beyond and above us? This group got an interesting topic.



SELFIE CULTURE

So this generation likes to take selfies – and people are saying that is a definite indication of it being the "me generation." Whether or not it is true, this group talked.











Testimony: Finding Christ amidst great adversity and blindness

t is during the greatest of adversities that the indomitable human spirit shines through the brightest. Look around and you will find many examples of people who fit this description.

Such an example can be found in Rev. Stephen Arulampalam, who is currently attending the AEYA 2018 in Manado, North Sulawesi as a Resource Person.

Born in Jaffna, Sri Lanka, the 45-year-old Anglican clergy has been blind for a quarter of a century. An able-bodied sportsman until the age of 20, he adjusted to his new life with tremendous courage and grace.

He speaks about his life: "When I was nine-month old, I caught a fever and my parents took me to the Jaffna government hospital. There, the doctor on duty accidentally prescribed the wrong medicine and it affected my nervous system. I had sight until I was 20, but then the world started growing darker. Now, I am in a totally different world, but I praise the Lord for he is a merciful God," said the ever-smiling clergyman.

He said he had enough time to prepare for the eventual loss of sight, and that God gave him strength to emerge stronger from the ordeal.

"My parents made me aware of my condition from a very young age. The doctor too wrote a letter accepting his mistake and I forgave him. Knowing what was in store for me, I got time to prepare myself. I lived life to the fullest and when it

t is during the greatest of was time, I was well prepared for my adversities that the indom-blindness," he said.

If Rev. Stephen's physical disability made his life harder in later years, his younger days were spent fearing for his and his parents' life in wartorn Jaffna. Once again, his indomitable spirit and trust in God aided him in his journey forward.

"I was born in the midst of war, I was raised in the midst of war, and I studied in the midst of war. In 1995, there was a bomb blast next to my house and it got demolished. My father's right leg had to be amputated as he had a lot of shrapnel in it. My mother and brother still live with sharp metal pieces in their bodies. That was our reality."

"When we lost our house, we lost not just a building, but years of memories and our identity. We were relocated to a refugee camp and we stayed for several years. I wrote my board exams from the camp. God was great and he helped me pass my exam," he said.

He also spoke about his experiences during war, which served to make his faith stronger: "I became an ordained priest in 2001 and served in Jaffna for eight years. Since I am Tamil, and I speak Sri Lanka's Sinhala language, I was a mediator between Lankan army and the locals.

"In 2007, just after finishing a church service, I came out to sounds of a man being shot by unidentified assailants. They threatened me with bodily harm if I dared to take the wounded man to hospital. But God gave me strength. I refused to back down and took him to hospital. On



the way, he died on my lap and my cassock was covered in his blood. I was able to comfort the dying man, and it is an experience I will never forget," he said.

Rev. Stephen recalled another personal experience, that same year, which he said changed his life.

"I had organised a seminar for war widows with the help Sri Lanka's Roman Catholic Church. It was planned for a Saturday morning. Just before I could leave my house, armed Sri Lankan military men surrounded it. They said they would not let me leave or organise the meeting."

"I stood my ground and told them all I wanted to do was cry with the widows of war. I told them I would also organise a meeting for war widows of Sri Lankan Armymen. War creates widows on both sides. It was a profound moment that pushed me to try and become a hope for the helpless," he said.

All the hardships that life threw at him only served to make Rev. Stephen grow more in Christ and spread his words with new vigor. His family, consisting of wife Vathny and daughter Susanna, also supports his endeavor to do good for the society.

Rev. Stephen currently teaches Church History at the Theological College of Lanka and is also its Academic Dean. He has written eight books and the latest one — Theology of Disability — was published in last January.

Rev. Stephen will speak at the AEYA's fourth thematic session "Embracing and Appreciating Diversities and Human Dignity."

(AJU GEORGE CHRIS)

Prophetic witness in a time of transition in Myanmar

yanmar nationals are in the transition period, fortunately no longer in the cusps of abuse and buckling ourselves up for the big chances in democracy. In this new system, we have more liberty to do as we want and corresponding responsibilities, too.

For those who do not know, Myanmar is a country in Southeast Asia

bordered by India and Bangladesh in the west, Thailand and Laos in the east and China in the north and northeast. We are over 100 ethnic groups. Myanmar, formerly know as Burma, has many bloody and sad chapters in its history; it has gone through much violence and hurt that no one can imagine.

Now, the politics itself is compli-



cated. The majority subscribe to Buddhism. Islam and Christianity are a minority. Only 6.2 percent is Christian. It is practiced mostly by the smaller ethnic groups, like Kachin, Chin, Lisu and others. Given our context, being Christian is not easy.

It is with the history and the current pluralism that I interpret prophetic witness of Myanmar Christians today. For me, prophetic witness is a call for all of us to actively participate in the society we live in: It's a very good time for Myanmar people to make our voice



loud, and we simply cannot miss this opportunity before us.

For Myanmar youth, I think it is time to say "Time's up!" to some things that have endured the times; and dare society to accept – and be enriched by – our difference.

"Time's up!" We need to prepare for egalitarianism. We need to end the culture of pay inequality, to stop discrimination; to pout a halt on harassment; and say "Times up!" to the abuse of power.

Dare. We must challenge the reigning divisions. As a nation, we must set an example for the generations before and after us. We must accept our differences. We must appreciate our oneness as a country, despite the many tribes and religions. We need to begin efforts at authentic harmonious society.

Young people have the power to break down walls and filter ideas. We must use that power to bring true unity and democracy in Myanmar.

(ZOBILAY HSI)

Meet the CCA's AEYA Organising team

's. Salome Nant Myat Noe Aein (Myanmar), Ms. Rosiana Indah Purnomo (Indonesia) and Ms. Gianina Fay Vecino (Philippines) are the members of the Christian Conference of Asia's (CCA) Asian Ecumenical Youth Assembly (AEYA) organising team.

The three young women, who are in their twenties, have been working in CCA as youth interns. Every year CCA gives opportunities to selected young people to work in the organization in specific programme areas.

As per the new programme structure, CCA does not have a separate Youth Desk. However, the number of youth programmes have been increased during the past two years. When CCA decided to hold the AEYA in Manado, North Sulawesi, the CCA General Secretary decided to assign the tasks of organizing the AEYA with the three young interns.

Gianina Fay Vecino has been involved with the CCA's communications team. "I have been an intern at the CCA for 10 months now. Helping organise AEYA was a huge challenge and opportunity for me. After arriving in North Sulawesi on March 28, I helped co-ordinate things with the local organising committee. It was a big learning experience," said the 24-year-old Fili-



From left, Gia, Rosi and Salome.

pino national.

Rosiana Indah Purnomo have been with the CCA for only three months, but she had an important role to play in AEYA's success. "I'm Indonesian. Since I'm proficient in the local language, I acted as the link between CCA and local Indonesian churches and its leaders. It has continued even after the conference's start. I now have a better understanding of how major events like AEYA are organised," said Rosiana, who is 29.

Salome Nant Myat Noe Aein, 21, completed 11 months with the CCA when she was given the opportunity to work on AEYA. "I was involved in communicating with the conference's various resource persons and taking care of all their local needs. On the day prior to the conference's opening, I also helped with registering its 350 participants. It was a very exciting time," she said. Salome also spoke about how working at the CCA changed her for the better.

"By nature, I am a shy person and I try to keep away from communicating with people. But once I joined CCA, I started interacting with people from different nationalities and it gave me a huge boost. The AEYA has only added further to my sense of confidence".

CCA General Secretary Dr. Mathews George Chunakara said he had confidence in the abilities of his three young colleagues and their capacity to organize a major event like the AEYA under his direct supervision and with the guidance of other senior staff members of CCA

All three of them worked hard and contributed immensely to the AEYA's organization, which was not an easy task. The CCA General Secretary expressed his great satisfaction and deep appreciation to the three staff members for the major responsibility they undertook.

Powerful worship and spiritual life motivating the young people in the assembly

oices of the suffering filled the hall for the the first-person point of view.
morning worship last All reflected the realities of Asia. umenical Youth Assembly (AEYA) held in Grand Kawanua Conference Center, Manado, Indonesia.

In a reflective "Kum ba Yah," selected participants from across the participating countries enacted the narratives of a domestic worker, a depressed individual, a woman who perished from the rape culture, a jobless college graduate, a

Rahel Daulay

child bride and many others from

Tuesday at the Asian Ec- The morning thus began on an emotional note for the 350-strong AEYA delegation. True enough, worships at this ecumenical gathering have taken us through a rollercoaster of emotions. But exactly how did AEYA come up with these powerful services?

"We work as a team," said Rahel Daulay, who leads the worship team. You heard her angelic voice singing some solos and teaching us songs before the worships begin.

"Before we drafted the liturgy, we tried to discuss the needs of the youth and revisit the purpose of this assembly," she explained. "After we had one sense about the needs and purposes, we try to combine some creativity, take some resources and songs from worship books."

They also co-opt participants to feature their cultures, like the Filipino team with a Christian iteration of the Cordilleran "Salidummay" and the Indonesian delegates for the closing dance on Tuesday. "We try to combine everything, make them work altogether, and we create the worship with that mindset," she said, referring to the drafting team of four people. They divided the main authorship of the worships among themselves.

It goes beyond them, however. Behind them were numerous consultants and supporters, plus a manpower to provide the glorious music and technical.

The young people you see right

of the stage at the convention hall includes 15 people on the choir (whose voices are impossibly so good so early) and 10 musicians on different instruments. They were recruited from Sekolah Tinggi Agama Kristen Nasional, a theological school that is, believe it or not, subsidized by the government.

The young talents train for the morning worships after the evening person inspiration," she said.

worships; and the evening worships after the morning worships. "Practice never stops," Rahel quipped.

Looking back, Rahel cannot fully explain how the team came up with the diverse but equally beautiful worships - but she gives it all back to a divine source.

"Of course, this is all through the wisdom of God. God has given each

THE FACES BEHIND CCA NEWS



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