

cca news



Justice and Peace Now!

Justice and peace now!



“I will pour out my spirit on all flesh; your sons and daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, and your young men shall see visions. Even on the male and female slaves in those days, I will pour my spirit.” (Joel 2:28-30)

August 12 is observed each year as International Youth Day. It was designated in 1991 by the United Nations to recognize the youth and promote their contributions to society, as well as to draw people’s attention to youth issues worldwide.

The question for us churches in Asia is: What have we done to and with the young people? We often claim that the youth is the church of tomorrow. Yet, we tend to forget that the youth is an integral sector of the church and a part of God’s people today.

In the midst of a rapid changing global situation many young people around the world are facing the tremendous impact of globalization, such as poor access to education and health services, poverty, high unemployment rate, crimes, violence, changes of values, identity crisis, and cultural prejudice against the young which often hinder their growth as joyful and responsible beings.

More often communities including the church easily blame them without a willingness to properly accompany them in responding to the great and complex challenges of today which, in most cases are beyond their capacities. Many young people

today impatiently voice it out that they want “justice and peace now!”

For some countries in Asia including India, Pakistan, Korea and Indonesia, August is a special month as they celebrate their Independence days. It is a day to commemorate their release from the captivity of colonial powers that ruled them for many years in the past.

We believe that freedom is a gift from God. It offers opportunities for human beings and all creation to live their lives in its fullness. However, freedom seems to be far a reality from the lives of many, particularly of those living in Asia. Powers and principalities still continuously dominate and capture the lives of many Asian people today.

Not only the young people but all people of Asia are longing and dreaming for genuine freedom. It is still a long journey. But we fervently pray for God’s Spirit to pour upon us all so that people of different generations will be able to prophesy, to dream dreams and to envision clearly how do we move ahead towards attaining fullness of life for all.

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A disturbing dimension of peace

“Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I have not come to bring peace, but a sword.” (Matthew 10:34, NRSV)

This is one of the most disturbing, controversial and shocking statements made by Jesus. If we literally read the Bible we may ponder: How could Jesus the ‘Prince of Peace’ talk about waging conflict? At first glance it indeed appears that Jesus encourages violence and calls his disciples to practice it, presumably righteous violence. Does this mean, then, that Jesus calls for a holy war with a physical, military sword against his fellow Jews?

The thesaurus and Oxford dictionary define peace as quite calm, silence, tranquility, harmony, stillness, repose and serenity. Questions may arise in our mind why Jesus did not talk of this sort of peace. In order to understand this controversial and difficult statement of Jesus we have to re-read the Bible and understand the context.

History says that Jesus never wielded a sword against anyone. It is true that the Roman Emperor Constantine and Medieval Crusaders have misinterpreted and misused this verse as justification to wage war and use sword against people of other faith. But Jesus never endorsed violence.

Jesus here is talking of a metaphorical, prophetic and spiritual sword which will break the status quo, challenge injustice prevalent in society and within our own homes. So the peace that Jesus speaks of is not a comfortable,

serene, still, silent and passive peace, but one that is active and prophetic with a disturbing dimension which will make us uncomfortable and urge us to wage justpeace to transform society. Justpeace is the crux of prophetic ministry and can heal and reconcile broken relationships and communities.

Nurturing justpeace through creative spirituality was the main focus of the Ecumenical Creative Workshop for Youth and Students in Asia and the Pacific organized by CCA in partnership with EASY Net and the Hong Kong Christian Council (HKCC). “Jesus was a youth like us and had passion like us to transform the world,” claimed Rafael, one of the participants. “Then why is it today that the prophetic voices of the youth are not recognized or valued by our churches?” he added.

Another participant, William Phaibun, a Karen youth leader living in a refugee camp in the Thai-Burma border proclaimed: “We have the power and creative spirituality within us to be harbingers of peace. Come let us weave a circle of peace and heal our wounds and one another.”

The Youth and Students who attended the workshop gave a clarion call and invitation to all through their song composed by Divya Jacob, a youth intern of the National Council of Churches in India:

Justice and peace,
who will bring?
Peace and justice,
who will bring?
Aren't we?
Don't waste the time.

Justice and Peace Now!

You can make a better tomorrow
Youth can make today better
Let's give a hope of ray
To the poor and needy
Let's join our hands
and our hearts
To heal one another
To make it a better world
A better world, to live in
With 'justice and peace together'.

Moumita Biswas



*From left:
Devashrie de Silva,
Wing Sze Tong,
Moumita Biswas,
and the Rev. Po
Kam Cheong.*

Empire or God's reign?

It is not difficult to find ourselves in the story of the Israelites narrated in the book of Exodus. They were living in an oppressive and violent society under the Egyptian empire whose ruler is the deified Pharaoh. Signs are clear today. We live under an imperial rule. The widening gap between the poor and the rich, the proliferation of military might in both urban and rural communities, the unjust labor policies of multi-national companies and the unabated skyrocketing prices of basic commodities are clear manifestations that, like Israel in the early chapters of Exodus we are living in an oppressive and violent times under an empire whose king is Mammon. Established are the structures of injustice. Reigning is the rule of violence. Peace is elusive, and oppressive rulers unyielding to the outcry of the people.

The book of Exodus narrates a struggle for deliverance as well as the plight of God's chosen nation to the 'promised land'. A Christian life has the same narrative. We live under a sinful condition until Jesus Christ came into our lives and redeemed us from the curse of death and sin to life in its fullness. Much as it is true on a personal level, the realities of oppression and violence and our need for collective redemption challenge us to transcend our individualistic view. We need to look at the bigger picture of our community life, with much consideration to our collective history and present-day realities.

Is the Church as a 'chosen people' and as covenantal communities still in Egypt? Are the young people today captives of the present-day empire?

Egypt is both a physical and a mental location. Throughout history, the realities of Egyptian empire incarnates through the rise of empires that pursue to build a world under their control. It is a world where the powerful are protected and their interests are promoted, subjugating the weak through oppression and violence.

We are currently under a violent empire. Young people especially women from the third-world countries are forced to leave home to do the back-breaking job of a domestic helper. Back home they are forced to be awake and work during the night

in different call centers looming in the big cities in Asia. They are held hostage to their economic needs, unmindful of their well being in the name of survival. Similarly, our natural resources are exploited, displacing indigenous people from their ancestral lands, and snatching a sustainable ecology from the present and future generations. The empire facilitates this modern-day slavery and colonization through the system of globalization. The ones benefiting from the system are those in power, thus maintaining the status quo of inequality and injustice.

Alarmingly, the existence of gross poverty and the suffering of many in the third- world countries in contrast to the affluence in the first-world countries do not bother us anymore. Furthermore, this violent paradigm, albeit been challenged many times, has not been altered but contrastingly promulgated through legislation in governments and justification of different social institutions including the Church.

Oftentimes, the Church connives and cooperates with the empire. The empire finds justification of



*Question:
How to
shed off
an empire
mindset?
Rafael
Patrick
Pecjo at the
Ecumenical
Creative
Workshop
of Youth
and
Students in
July 2011
in Hong
Kong.*

violence and oppression in our theologies and religious teachings, thus the spiritual comfort we find even in the face of dire poverty and obvious unfair and unequal treatment of the people in favor of the status quo. The Church, instead of promoting the good news of salvation, adheres to the violent paradigms of the empire, a bad news for many and a repugnant contrast to the liberating character and teachings of Jesus.

The young people's imagination is programmed for the wills and causes of empire. An imperial

leaving behind the imperial imagination to help build God's reign now?

We reflect at the narratives of the Israelites and we see ourselves under a violent empire. Again the Church is being invited by God, whose name is I Am, to facilitate exodus from the imperial imagination of Mammon to a God's reign-minded lifestyle, where the poor, the oppressed, the marginalized are given preferential option, thus the creation of a just and equitable society where God's peace grounded in justice reigns. It is the



Youth solidarity is minding God's reign. (From left: Marc Oliver Natan (YIFI), Astrid Bor Drejer and Therese Bergersen (Norwegian interns), Sue (Korean student from Union Theological Seminary), Mavreen Mae Malecda (NCCP staff), and Benny Mendoza (ECP) at the 2010 Human Rights Day Rally on Dec. 10, 2010, in Manila.

mindset keeps us silent, feeding our generation's imagination with justifications of the status quo. Our generation is silenced and maimed by the empire.

Departure from an imperial mindset requires our commitment to continually seek learning through hearing the voice of the voiceless and immersing ourselves in the lives of the people living in the margins. Let us reread the Bible using the eyes of the oppressed and proclaim theologies that will deliver them from victimization to empowerment and transformation. In the same manner, we the young people has to be empowered to bravely dispute and tear down violent structures and build another where justice, equality and communitarian accountability prevail. This is now "a time to break down, and a time to build up." (Ecclesiastes 3.3b)

God's reign is perpetually challenged by the rise of empire. Are our actions contributing to the agenda of the reign of God or are in connivance and cooperation with the empire? Whose side are we on? Are the young people in Asia now ready to tread the path leading to the 'promised land'? Are we empowered to cross seas and rivers bravely,

Promised Land where there is enough for all and everyone contributes to sustain life.

We are to counter this culture of inequality with equality. We are to observe the Sabbath and shun greediness. We are to define peace grounded in justice not just mere silence - IF WE WANT JUSTICE AND PEACE TO REIGN NOW.

Ariel Siagan

Ariel is coordinator of Social and Interfaith Concerns desk of the Iglesia Evangelica Metodista en las Islas Filipinas (IEMELIF) and its former National Youth President. He now studies at the Asian Theological Seminary while working with the Christian Unity and Ecumenical Relations of the National Council of Churches in the Philippines. He was a participant in the 2010 Asia Ecumenical Course held in Malaysia.

Restless for peace

“We are restless for Peace,” claimed one Asian youth leader at the Program Area Committee (PAC) meeting of the Ecumenical Formation, Gender Justice and Youth Empowerment (EGY) cluster of CCA in New Delhi, India, in February 2011.

Devashrie de Silva, a young, talented youth leader from Sri Lanka who is also a General Committee member of CCA, sharing with others about her country's situation said: “We are talking about peace in Sri Lanka for a long time. There are lots of negotiations and peace talks among political leaders and diplomats to resolve the conflict in Sri Lanka that has been going on for a long time. But do we have peace in Sri Lanka? I am restless for peace.”



Joy Sen Lok Yue from Macau (seated) and Patricia E. N. Sembor from Indonesia in a group sharing.

Angelous Michael, a Dalit youth leader from India and Vice President of the National Council of Churches in India (NCCI) said: “We young people with our creative energies, talents and spiritualities are and can be agents of peace. We have the power to transform the world. Every drop of water makes an ocean and every effort for peace and justice made by us is valuable in the eyes of God and can transform society.”

These youth church leaders in the Delhi meeting strategized how CCA in partnership with member churches,

councils and ecumenical partners can revitalize and promote youth involvement in the prophetic ministry in church and society. They proposed that CCA organize a creative youth workshop for ecumenical formation to make use of their talents and mould their creative spiritualities as tools for advocacy for peace and justice.

Support from HKCC

Ms Wing Sze Tong from Hong Kong, also an EGY PAC member took the initiative to request the Hong Kong Christian Council (HKCC) to host a youth activity/workshop in 2011, especially as this year is International Year of the Youth. Rev. Po Kam Cheong, General Secretary of HKCC who is also CCA Executive Committee member said that it is the duty of CCA member churches and councils to express solidarity to strengthen the ecumenical youth movement, and that HKCC will definitely host and partner with CCA.

Ecumenical Networking for Justpeace

The need for a creative ecumenical workshop of youth and students in Asia and the Pacific to produce a resource book in this International Year for Youth was further strengthened and emphasized during the EASY Net Core Team/Committee Annual Meeting in Hong Kong on 5-7 April 2011. It was decided that CCA in partnership with HKCC and EASY Net will organize a creative workshop for 25 youth leaders in Asia.

The Ecumenical Creative Workshop of Youth and Students in Asia and the Pacific based on the theme, ‘Justice and Peace Now!’ was thus held in Tao Fong Shan Centre, Hong Kong, on 25- 31 July 2011, where 25 youth leaders from CCA member churches and EASY Net participated.

The workshop aimed to create a common platform for youth church leaders/students from Asia and the Pacific to articulate and demonstrate peace and justice concerns through alternative creative art forms; develop theological understanding to uphold and affirm life in its fullness in the context of an unjust society (world); strengthen revive/revitalize Asian youth ecumenical networking and promote

Rev. Bharat Raj Patta, General Secretary of the Student Christian Movement (SCM) in India, Ms Necta Montes, Regional Secretary of World Student Christian Federation - Asia Pacific (WCSF-AP) facilitated the creative participatory Bible studies using Asian contextual hermeneutics in re-reading the Bible. The youth themselves also did a group creative Bible study where they used



youth involvement in prophetic ministry of peace, justice, healing and reconciliation; and produce a resource material/book to be used to help mobilize and revitalize ecumenical youth groups in grassroots communities and local churches especially as we are commemorating the International Year of the Youth.

Splashing Colors of Peace

Creative workshops on dance and spirituality for justice were facilitated by Dr. Rommel Linatoc and Julian from the Christian Dance Fellowship in Malaysia and Dr Valli Bachelor. Rev Ken Seng Chong, a famous Christian artist working with indigenous communities and youth facilitated an art therapy, healing and reconciliation workshop where the youth shared their own stories of violence and brokenness and the power within them to heal communities through creative ways.

Taichi and dance and traditional Asian indigenous spirituality to reinterpret different dimensions of peace.

Participants shared how they celebrated the International Year of the Youth and their efforts advocating for recognition of the youth participation in the decision making processes in church and society. They also shared about how in their context the youth play a crucial role in weaving peace amidst violence and various issues that impact the youth.

The participants also planned for the Asian Students Youth Gathering or ASYG to be held in 2012 where more than 150 youth are expected. ASYG is the EASY Net's youth gathering held every four years. CCA as part of EASY Net plays a crucial role in this plan.

Workshop participants.

Moumita Biswas

Equipping ecumenical enablers

A total of 78 participants completed the Ecumenical Enablers' Training (EET) program recently conducted by CCA-FMU joint executive staff. Of this number, 44 were Vietnamese and 34 Nepalese.

Although CCA does not have a church member yet in Vietnam, the holding of the training was made possible with the help of some Vietnamese alumni from a Thai seminary. The training in Ho Chi Minh City on 26-28 April 2011 was

Nepalese participants came from independent churches and included some youth and women students as well as self-made pastors or pastors with limited theological training.

In both countries, the concept of denomination is not common. Instead, the congregations name themselves as independent churches. However, denominational groups have also started to enter the countries.

The theme of the EET in both countries was "Living Together in the Household of God." This was a way of naming wider ecumenism, given the prevalent negative propaganda against the ecumenical movement in Vietnam and Nepal. In the general introduction and theme exposition, the "Household of God" was explained not in terms of traditional church language. Instead it was explained by building on the root word, *oikos*, in *Oikoumene* and the Asian sense of household - which is beyond blood lines and inclusive of the habitat and all that dwell therein, as well as of the spirits of ancestors whose presence is still felt and celebrated. Thus, the Household of God is the whole universe that God created, loved, and entrusted to all people.

Program contents included daily worship, and the voices and perspectives of creation, people of different ethnicity, religions and cultures, abilities, gender, the poor and oppressed, the sick and those with HIV and AIDS, who are all part of the Household of God. Issues of brokenness and divisions were highlighted as well as ways to overcome them in order to bring integrity and wholeness in God's household.

There was some kind of initial hesitance towards interfaith and



Small group discussion. the first CCA-organized Ecumenical Enablers Training held in Vietnam.

The training in Lalitpur, Kathmandu on 23-27 May 2011 was the second to be held in Nepal (the first having been held in April 2009). It was organized in cooperation with the National Council of Churches in Nepal, a CCA member, led by Dr. K B Rokaya, a member of the CCA Presidium.

Vietnamese participants came from independent churches, including recognized and semi-recognized groups. They included students in mission training centers, self-made pastors with some or limited theological training.

feminist concerns but CCA-FMU staff explained that religious plurality in Asia is something we cannot escape from - hence, it should be part of our Asian theologizing. The same is true with Asian feminist theologizing, which is a must in Asia, where we have one of the worst records of gender injustice.

At the close of the training, some Vietnamese participants mentioned that their government would have been happy to know of our concern for interreligious harmony in the country. A number of Vietnamese appreciated the exposure to ways that Christians in other countries are doing their own

in order to reach out to more people. Although this recommendation was already made in 2009, it was difficult trying to organize the training outside of Kathmandu due to the unstable political situation in Nepal.

Some Nepali participants shared that they now have a new picture of NCCN and the ecumenical movement. They said they heard many other things about NCCN before but now they understand why NCCN is so involved in social/political issues.

One Nepali participant confessed how he used to teach in a school about



Asian theologizing to make the gospel take root in our Asian soil. They said they were encouraged to come up with their own Vietnamese way of theologizing. Many of them appreciated the new way of reading scriptures to counter the very traditional and often narrow interpretation of biblical passages.

In Nepal, some participants shared that this training opened to them new ideas especially about relating with women, youth and children, people with HIV and AIDS, and the whole creation as household of God. There was a strong recommendation to hold a similar training in the remote areas of Nepal

man and woman, using the creation stories in Genesis but now he is happy to have learned a new way of reading (interpreting) these stories which promote gender justice instead of injustice and inequality.

It is hoped that as participants share what they have learned with others in their respective churches, there will be more ecumenical enablers who will witness to the wider ecumenical vision in their own contexts.

Training participants.

Hope S. Antone

Youth and Women:

Reviving prophetic ecumenism

“We are facing an ecumenical winter in Asia. If the youth ecumenical movement is revived and revitalized we can usher in an ecumenical spring. The youth are the leaders and hope for the future but they are also present leaders of our society. So it is the prophetic duty of Asian churches to promote ecumenical formation and leadership development of the youth and their involvement in the decision-making processes in church and society.”

An ecumenical winter... This is an excerpt from the statement made by the youth leaders who participated in a consultative workshop and Program Area Committee (PAC) meeting organized by the CCA Ecumenical Formation, Gender Justice and Youth Empowerment (EGY) cluster

a major crisis. Asia is plagued by globalization, neo-colonization, climate change, wars, ethnic conflicts, terrorism, militarization, caste-based violence, gender-based discrimination and violence resulting in abject poverty for many and the enrichment of a few. Indigenous people, women, children and youth are the most vulnerable to hunger, malnutrition, disease, forced migration, human and child trafficking and violence. Churches in Asia have failed to address and respond to urgent issues and failed to nurture, sustain, promote, recognize, the prophetic energy and ecumenical spirit of the youth and women.



Wing Sze Tong (right) in a visit to a street children's project in New Delhi.

in New Delhi on 9-12 February 2011, with the theme, “Reviving Prophetic Ecumenism: Role of Youth and Women in Asia”. Thirty youth and women church leaders and EGY PAC members attended this activity to plan, strategize and help revive a prophetic ecumenical movement in Asia.

Participants claimed that the Asian ecumenical movement is facing

...and an ecumenical spring

The ecumenical youth in Asia has a splendid and glorious history, said the participants. They contributed profoundly as ambassadors of transformation despite many challenges. Women and youth church leaders continuously strive to find a new vision and mission, hope and praxis-oriented paradigms in being prophets of peace, even though many have been already martyred for championing human rights and for their prophetic acts for justice.

The participants along with the EGY PAC strategized how CCA in partnership with CCA members can nurture a prophetic ministry of healing and reconciliation to strengthen

the youth and women ecumenical movement in Asia. They defined the focus, programs and projects of EGY for the next few years as mandated by the CCA Assembly in 2010.

Johanna de la Cruz and Ronald Paz Caraig from the National Council of Churches Philippines (NCCP) suggested that every year NCCP organize a basic ecumenical course or BEC. In 2011 it will be organized in collaboration with CCA or CCA can recommend participants from other CCA members. Ms Wing Sze Tong, EGY PAC member from Hong Kong volunteered to negotiate with the Hong Kong Christian Council (HKCC) to partner and host a youth leadership training.

Warit Anuchiracheewa, a youth leader from the Church of Christ in Thailand (CCT) said that CCT will always support the youth and women's work of CCA. CCA and CCT could collaborate on the HIV and AIDS ministry among youth and women in Asia, and facilitate an ecumenical leadership development of migrant youth and women workers and refugees from Myanmar living in the borders of Thailand. William Phaibun, a youth of Karen origin teaching in a seminary in a refugee camp, was able to attend one youth workshop organized by CCA. He suggested that CCA can help organize a youth ecumenical training for healing and reconciliation, and facilitate sending theological teachers from abroad to teach in the seminary in the border camps.

Ms. Devashrie de Silva from the National Council of Churches in Sri Lanka (NCCSL) and also a CCA General Committee member recommended that the NCCSL can

train youth interns from other parts of South Asia. Gloria Kalpona Sirkar, Executive Secretary for Women's Concerns in the National Council of Churches in Bangladesh shared that Bangladesh needs training for young women, lay and church leaders on gender justice, child protection and sexual harassment policies. It was decided that an intensive training



on gender justice and inclusive communities be organized and conducted in the Bengali language to benefit especially the grassroots youth and women.

It was also recommended that CCA revive its networking with the World Student Christian Federation - Asia Pacific (WSCF-AP) and EASY Net to further promote the ecumenical youth movement in Asia. Additionally, CCA member churches and councils must increasingly own EGY activities by sharing resources.

Rev. Retno Ngapon, Ronald Paz Caraig and Warit Anuchiracheewa in a workshop presentation.

Moumita Biswas

South Korean Churches

Aiding food to North Korea

An emergency food aid shipment of 120 tons of flour was transported by the Amity Foundation to North Korea on the request of the National Council of Churches in Korea (NCC Korea). This humanitarian food aid would help stave off starvation by thousands of pre-school age children due to the famine. This humanitarian aid shipment went through three long stages spanning almost three months, namely: establishing contact with Amity Foundation by both CCA and WCC, contact with food suppliers and the DPRK consulate in Hong Kong; checking the quality of the food to be transported, signing the contract in Dangdong, and delivery by trucks across the border into Pyongyang; and arrival of the goods and checking food condition by Amity Foundation staff.

The Korean Christian Federation (KCF) in the North has already sent in a request for a second shipment of 480 tons of flour for which NCC Korea will raise funds. While the United Church of Canada and the British Methodist Church have pledged a total of \$37,000, NCC Korea will need to raise from among its member churches in the South the balance of \$116,000 through an emergency food aid appeal. CCA is supporting and has endorsed this appeal among its member churches and councils.

Church leaders, members of the Ecumenical Forum for Korea (EFK) were hosted by the Amity Foundation in Nanjing in a meeting held on 16 and 17 June 2011. Other matters discussed in the meeting were preparations for the 2013 WCC Assembly to be held in Busan, South Korea, where the North-South Korea agenda will be deliberated. Also discussed at the meeting was the plan for a Peace Train that will travel along the European corridor through Berlin, Vladivostok and Beijing and crossing the border between the North and South Korea, which will encourage more young people to actively participate in the Busan Assembly through the peace train experience.

The Ecumenical Forum also discussed developments among the member ecumenical organizations

and countries represented, particularly with regards to peace and reunification in the Korean peninsula.

NCKK plans on the peninsula include a musical concert at Kosung, close to the North-South Korea border in October 2011, a Prayer Meeting in Kaesong to commemorate the June 15th Joint Agreement, and the Peace Train coming to the WCC Assembly in Busan in 2013. Discussions also included a report on the Korean reunification listening session or workshop in Kingston, Jamaica at the International Ecumenical Peace Convocation (IEPC) held last May 18-25, 2011; a visit of ecumenical partners to the North in 2012 to coincide with the EFK Steering Group Meeting; and future directions for the EFK.

Steering Group members of EFK present at the meeting were the Rev. Isamu Koshiishi (NCC Japan General Secretary), Rev. Paul Oppenheim (EKD Asia Program Secretary), Rev. Ri Jong Ro (KCF General Secretary), Mr. Jon Se Yong (KCF Staff for Ecumenical Relations), Rev. Kim, Young Ju (NCC Korea General Secretary), Rev. Heawon Chae (EFK Coordinator), Ms Bern Jagunos (UCC Canada Asia Mission Secretary), Dr. Mathews George Chunakara (WCC Director for International Affairs), Mr. Carlos Ocampo (CCA Executive Secretary for Justice, International Affairs, Development and Service), and Mr. Qiu Zhonghui, Ms She Hongyu and Ms Zheng Wei (Amity Foundation Secretary General and Program Staff, respectively).

Carlos Ocampo

Members of EFK Steering Group with North and South Korea church leaders.



Building HIV competent churches

CCA is spearheading the building of HIV competent churches in the Mekong Region and in some other countries in Asia where HIV is fast spreading. A Capacity Building on Training of Trainers on Building HIV Churches was held in Yangon, Myanmar, on June 19-23, 2011.

After the Training of Trainers, the first seminar on “Building HIV Competent Churches: Called to Prophecy, Reconcile, and Heal” was held at the Kachin Baptist Church in Lashio, Myanmar, on June 26-29, 2011.

The Churches Action to Stop AIDS (CASA) of the Myanmar Baptist Convention, the Lashio Council of Churches (LCC), the Myanmar Council of Churches (MCC), Karuna Myanmar Social Services (KMSS) and the Myanmar Catholic HIV and AIDS Network (MCHAN) saw the need to introduce the program on building HIV Competent Churches in Lashio.

One of the distinctive features of this program was it was the first time for Protestants and Catholics to come together in a seminar on HIV. In this way, they have enriched the process of learning from each other. The two outreach programs visited in the exposure program: People Living with HIV and AIDS Drop-In Center (PLHA DIC) and the Catholic Shelter (KMSS and MCHAN program) gave the participants an opportunity to meet PLHIV+ and what the churches can do.

The Context of HIV in the Shan State

Participants shared that narcotic drugs are easily available in the Shan States. Poppies are grown and the seeds are grounded and inhaled, smoked and even used for drinking by families working in the poppy plantation. The young people get addicted to it. The training team that visited the Effective Approaches Project in the Lashio Township learned that injecting drug use is the main driver of the epidemic in the area. The project is run by ex-drug users, mostly young people serving as peer educators, recreation facilitators, and



Participants visited the PLHA Drop-In Center sponsored by the Lashio Council of Churches, the day there was a handout of school fees amounting to Kyat12,000.00.

health educators. The program provides clean needles and syringes to young people who are injecting drug users. They serve more than 700 men who use drugs and a few women who come to their drop-in center. There is also a nurse that gives health services to people coming to exchange used needles and syringes.

As the Shan State borders with China, migration in search for better paying jobs are common among young people but they end up caught in sex trade and human trafficking. Many return infected with HIV. One pastor buried ten people who died of AIDS-related illness and referred one woman living with HIV to the PLHA (People Living with HIV and AIDS) Drop-In Center of the Lashio Christian Council. Pastors related that stigma and discrimination of PLHIV+ are strong because the church members are afraid to get the disease. There is also self stigma among PLHIV+. Moreover, medicines are not easily accessible to the population.

Capacity Building of Religious Leaders and Lay People on Building HIV Competent Churches
There are three powerful contributions that

churches can contribute in meeting the challenge of HIV. They are: 1) Break the silence; 2) Eliminate stigma and discrimination; and 3) Become HIV and AIDS Competent.

Break the Silence

Many issues related to HIV and AIDS are not confronted by the churches because part of it is related to human sexuality, a taboo subject for many patriarchal, closed and hierarchical cultures and supported by puritanical Christian religions introduced in Asia. In general, as Asian children, we grew up in families that do not allow us to ask questions and learn about human sexuality. Questions on sexuality are not responded to by parents and elders because they are shocked to hear these questions raised and also they are not capable to respond to the questions properly.

Participants visit a Buddhist monastery. Originally from Bangladesh and a Hindu by faith, Dr. Mini is a volunteer medical doctor. She shared how she came to know about the monastery and seeing the good work, she offered free medical services.



Just like the story of Tamar in the Bible, there are domestic sexual abuses that happen in some families and these are not talked about in public as it brings shame to the family. Often the women are blamed for the gender-based violence that they experience within their nuclear and extended families. Religions teach about dos and don'ts but do not provide the handle for ethical

and moral decision making on our bodies and our encounter with it in our daily lives. Some of the issues are related to doctrinal view that sex is solely for procreation and that the union between men and women is the accepted practice.

Another important exploration in building an HIV competent church is challenging our assumptions and the way we construct our understanding of God. The God that we have known in our church teachings could be one of the underlying causes for silence in church communities. For a long time religions preach a patriarchal and hierarchical God based in the context of a Judeo-Christian understanding of a God who dwells on high and is strong, great and mighty and render God as untouchable rather than a God who loves us and journeys with us in our suffering, in our illnesses, in our weakness, in our failures.

Eradicating stigma and discrimination

Stigma and discrimination are at the heart of the inability of the churches to practice their God-given mission to serve the members of the community who are sick. Stigma as defined by UNAIDS is "a process of devaluation of people either living with associated with HIV." Discrimination follows stigma resulting to unfair or unjust treatment of PLHIV+.

Jesus Christ is our role member of a servant leader who did not devalue people, no matter what their status in life is. He did not discriminate anyone. He bore our stigma. He talked with tax collectors, dined with drunkards, and encountered sex workers. To those who would cast stones to a woman caught in adultery, he wrote on the ground,

“Those of you who have not sinned, cast the first stone.”

Giving a space for reading the Bible with new eyes will help eliminate stigma and discrimination, break the silence and build HIV competency in the churches. Learning from PLHIV+ is also very important and therefore exposure programs help in understanding HIV and AIDS.

Becoming HIV and AIDS competent

Central to building HIV competent churches are leadership, knowledge and resources that will bridge the inner and outer competencies of the religious leaders and lay people. The World Council of Churches developed the bench mark and assessment tools of HIV Competent Churches. This was shared to the participants for their guidance in assessing the competency of their faith communities.

Dr. Sue Parry, resource person on building HIV Competent Churches invited in Yangon clarified on what it means to develop inner and outer competencies. According to her, “Inner Competency involves personalizing and internalizing the risk in an open honest way; recognizing the impact and consider long term consequences, accessing the risk factor that increase vulnerability; confront stigma, discrimination and denial; and accepting the imperative to respond. Outer Competency involves developing theological competence; technical competence; social relevance; inclusiveness; networking; advocacy; compassion and restoration of hope and dignity.”

Conclusion

While churches are already beginning to address HIV and AIDS, the inner reflection in church communities is as important as the outreach programs in order



Kids at an orphanage run by Buddhist monks. Singing welcome to the visiting participants, they are among the more than 600 children, mostly orphans and from the rural villages.

to ensure that the trajectories of churches involvement will be on the best interest of people living with HIV and the vulnerable groups like the young people. It is also best that meaningful involvement of PLHIV+ will enhance the development of churches’ inner and outer competencies in responding to HIV and AIDS.

Erlinda N. Senturias



Buddhist monk Patron Battanda Kaweinda speaking at the interfaith workshop.

A taste of unity in diversity



ACTS IV closing ritual - unity in God's Household.

Can Catholic and Protestant seminarians live and learn together? This question was in the minds of many participants in the Fourth Asia Conference of Theology Students (ACTS IV) - for whom it was their first time to have a close encounter with seminarians other than those from their own church denominations.

As seminarians engrossed in their own denominational teachings and confined to their own communities, they were initially anxious about having to live and learn together during this conference.

“Through ACTS IV, I was able to make new friends from other countries and to grasp the wider meaning of unity not only of the church but of the whole creation.” - Ernest A. Pallo, a Catholic seminarian from the Philippines.

“By living together, conversing with each other, we learned about each other's struggles and we find some common issues we share.” - Xavier Zong Jian Gu, a Catholic seminarian from HK/China.

“ACTS enriched my mind, strengthened my faith, opened my heart to other denominations, religions and all creation of God.” - (from an unsigned evaluation sheet)

These were some of the evaluation comments made by participants at the Fourth Conference of Theology Students (ACTS IV) held in Bangkok, Thailand on 3-7 April 2011.

A total of 31 seminarians came from Bangladesh, Hong Kong/China, India, Indonesia, Malaysia, Myanmar, Nepal, Pakistan, Philippines, Sri Lanka, Thailand and Vietnam. Of this number, 8 were Catholics while the others came from Protestant and Independent churches.

The conference included worship according to the traditions of CCA and FABC (Federation of Asian Bishops Conferences) as well as those of the participants.

Three biblico-theological reflections were made on the theme:

- **The Gift and Task of Unity in Christ** - with focus on intrafaith ecumenism through a reading of the *Lectio Divina* by Pope Benedict XVI;
- **Unity in the Household of God** - with focus on interfaith or wider ecumenism led by Metropolitan Dr. Geevarghese Mor Coorilos of the Malankara Jacobite Syrian Orthodox Church; and
- **Praying and Working Together for Unity** - with focus on the implications and application of the theme led by Archbishop Fernando Capalla of FABC.

These papers are published in CTC Bulletin.

Other program contents were analysis of Asian reality including an exposure

to Bangkok realities, sharing of country realities, and input on tools of social analysis; introductions to CCA and FABC; inputs on Conflict Transformation, Interfaith Relations and Cooperation, and Care for Creation. Dr. Parichart Suwanbubbha, a Buddhist professor of Mahidol University, shared on the peace building efforts in south Thailand.

At the end of the conference, participants came up with a statement with an appeal to CCA, FABC and their seminaries:

1. To encourage at the seminary level that our Ecumenism should be sensitive to the realities of Asia especially in the context of poverty, diversity and in the wider context of the inter-religious dialogue as well as in the integration of the whole creation.
2. To encourage the deeper integration of ecumenism among theology students at the local level through the emphasis on life witness by praying and mutual collaboration beginning with the dialogue of life.
3. To broaden the network of

collaboration among various Asian theology students through a better representation from all the denominations for an effective network at the regional level.

4. To encourage the use of Asian contextual resources in theologizing.
5. To encourage students and lecturers to have exchange programs within the Asian theological seminaries.

ACTS started as a CCA initiative and has become a joint program of CCA and FABC.

The objectives of ACTS are: to provide their seminarians with an experience of living and studying ecumenically together; to expose theology students to Asian contextual and ecumenical theologizing; and to provide a venue for theology students to share and reflect on issues that CCA and FABC are trying to deal with in their life and work. Efforts were also made to invite participants from the Evangelical and Pentecostal regional bodies.

Hope S. Antone

ACTS IV participants.



Peace and security in Asia

Thirty-five church leaders in Asia met in Bangkok in a consultation on peace and security in the region convened by the Christian Conference of Asia (CCA) and the World Council of Churches (WCC) on 2-4 August 2011.

Dr. Michael Vatikiotis, former editor of Far Eastern Economic Review Asian edition, in his keynote presentation identified three trends in Asia today - the emerging strategic competition between China and the United States and to a lesser extent India and China; contesting boundaries and challenging sovereignty in the quest for natural resources and more secure, cost-efficient trade routes; and the persistence of protracted internal conflicts based on social and ethnic or religious differences.

Vatikiotis also identified the rising temperature in South China Sea, China's peaceful rise to power and its need for energy supply increasing, a threat to security in the region, and weak governance and the proliferation of loose arms in India, southern Philippines and southern Thailand, constitute worrying threats to stability in the region.

Country situation reports from Japan, South Korea, Hong Kong, Iran, India, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Thailand, Myanmar, Laos, Philippines, Indonesia, Timor Leste, Australia and Malaysia were presented by representatives from

member churches and councils. The reports highlighted geopolitical issues confronting the people and the churches in these countries.

Geopolitical themes were also presented, including human rights and democratic governance by Mr. Basil Fernando, Director of the Asian Human Rights Commission; migration and rights of migrant workers by Carlos Ocampo, CCA's Executive Secretary for Justice, International Affairs, Development and Service (JID); internally displaced and stateless people by Ms Yin Yin Maw and Mr. Saw Shwe Lin of the Myanmar Council of Churches; conflicts and peacemaking in the context of geopolitical realities by Ms Carmencita Karagdag, Coordinator of Peace for Life Institute; and religious intolerance and freedom of religion by Dr. Matthews George Chunakara, International Affairs Director of WCC.

Perspectives on peace were presented by the Rev. Dr. Roger Gaiwad, General Secretary of the National Council of Churches in India.

These are:

- Peace-loving which seeks to cultivate peace as a pious virtue in individuals including prayer, retreats and quiet exercises;
- Peace-praying, a perspective which implies that the establishment of peace is

God's business and Christian neutrality is a virtue;

- Peace-keeping is the maintenance of law and order and God empowers governments;
- Peace-making is cultivating qualities, learning and teaching techniques to enable people to handle problems constructively; and
- Peace-building that provides health and wholesome employment of the people and the sharing of resources so that there is no want.

A Bible Study was led by the Rev. Dr. Joseph Peter Komar, Dean of the School of Theology Malaysia. He propounded that humanity is created in God's image (Imago Dei), endowed with dignity, having the right to dissent, and the capacity to love the neighbor and to accompany the broken and the oppressed. Being in solidarity with people offers the opportunity to

love ourselves.

A communique' that will guide the work of CCA and the WCC was passed by the Consultation is posted in the CCA website (www.cca.org.hk).

The team that organized the Consultation includes Dr. Matthews George Chunakara, Semegenish Asfaw, and Patricia Bruschweiler from the WCC, and Mr. Ocampo, Ms Pathyayotai Boontama, and Ms Kajeerat Doangsuwan from CCA.

Following the Consultation in the afternoon of 4th and the whole day of 5th August, members of the CCA - JID Program Area Committee met to review the mandates given by the Kuala Lumpur Assembly in 2010 and deliberated on the focus and implementation of programs proposed for 2011 to 2013. Ms Vijula Arulanthan, a lawyer and lay leader from the Anglican Church in Sri Lanka is Moderator of the JID Program Committee.

Carlos Ocampo

Consultation participants



Learning from disaster

Some religious groups are quick to attribute disasters, even natural disasters, to God. They would readily issue judgment theology - e.g. God caused the disaster as judgment or punishment of sinful people. The people of Aotearoa New Zealand (ANZ) were not spared from such a judgment theology. After the earthquakes in September 2010 and February 2011, some homes received religious leaflets calling them to repentance and announcing judgment. I came to know this when I visited Christchurch recently.

However, a number of church leaders in Christchurch do not agree with such a simplistic theology. "The earth does what the earth does," one of them said at an ecumenical panel organized by the Christian World Service (CWS) on 9 July in Upper Riccarton Methodist Church, in Christchurch. Panelists on "After the earthquake, churches working together" were Katrina Hill of CWS, Bob Anderson of St. Ambrose Church, Bob Turnbull of Baptist Church, and Michael Earle of the Anglican Church.

Even when bad things happen and natural disasters are not easy to explain why they happen, God is with the people as they struggle to claim life in fullness. In the midst of the devastation, for many people in Christchurch it did not matter how their houses were but how their neighbors were, one panelist shared. The need to respond to emergency provided an opportunity to rub shoulders with people across denominations, to love people unconditionally, and to cross denominational boundaries, another pointed out.

While CWS is used to responding to emergency overseas, it was a totally new experience to respond to one at home. However, staff learned that work overseas is the same at home - involving different communities, agencies, and especially the grassroots.



St. Luke's Anglican Church in Christchurch, which was badly hit by the earthquake.

Panelists also expressed concern for those most affected by the quakes came from the poorer side of the city, i.e. mostly Maori and Pacific people. They mentioned the need to take a community approach when moving people - knowing that there is difficulty in saying goodbye and moving to another place. There is more to moving a community of people than just the offer to grant insurance value of their property.

I began my response to the panel by saying that we in CCA were just as shocked by the news of the earthquakes that hit Christchurch. While we were sort of thinking that the people in New Zealand are so used to and prepared for a disaster like this (and we thought similarly of Japan), we were very shocked by the gravity of the disaster and its aftermath. Since we did not have the human and material resources to send to ANZ, we sent what we could - our positive energies through our prayers for calm, for perseverance, for wisdom and for resilience.

Then I tried to weave what I heard with the four shifts towards the wider ecumenical vision:

- The disaster can help Christchurch move from competition to cooperation among churches - the idea of doing and being church differently is a good example here. There were discussions in Christchurch on whether a denominational or an ecumenical cathedral should be built on the site of the old one.
- The disaster can help Christchurch move from isolation to collaboration with movements for justice and peace - the expressed need to take the government on social justice is a good example - knowing that the most affected by the quake and liquefactions come from the poorer area.
- The disaster can help Christchurch move from condemnation to dialogue with other religions. It was then shared that some Buddhists in the country gave a substantial donation for the quake victims. Knowing that many immigrants to ANZ are people with religions other than Christianity, it is important to consider this component of the wider ecumenism.
- The disaster can help Christchurch move from disintegration to integrity of creation - we cannot understand why disasters happen but we know that the earth is ageing and has changed so much as a result of our actions. I shared the statements of two persons who successfully climbed Mt. Everest - Edmund Hillary (from ANZ) who said, "I have conquered Mt. Everest" and Tenzing Norgay (from Nepal) who said, "I have befriended Mt. Everest." Conquering and befriending speak of

two different approaches to creation. It is time for us to think of befriending creation instead of conquering it. We need to befriend the volcanos around and beneath us. In addition we have to think about our roles as guests and hosts of the household of God - the two words are two sides of the word hospitality.

The visit to ANZ started with a plan by a CCA-FMU executive staff and an FMU Program Area Committee member, the Very Rev. Pamela Tankersley, to do a seminar with ministerial students of the Presbyterian Church in order to expose them to Asian ecumenical theology. It was expanded to include a solidarity visit to CCA-member churches in Christchurch. The Rev. Prince Devanandan, CCA General Committee member from ANZ, also organized two events in Auckland where I could share something on the wider ecumenical vision: with Methodist women and some other women and an ecumenical gathering of church people.

Hope S. Antone



Other church leaders responding to the panel in Christchurch, with Rev. Jenny Dawson (former CCA president) sharing from her small group.

Churches oppose Korean navy base plan

On the invitation of the Rev. Kim Young Ju, General Secretary of the National Council of Churches in Korea (NCCCK), a delegation from CCA visited the Jeju Island off the coast of the Korean peninsula on 8 to 11 August 2011.

The Rev. Alistair Macrae, President, Uniting Church in Australia; the Rev. Dr. Roger Gaikewad, General Secretary, the National Council of Churches in India; and Mr. Carlos Ocampo, CCA Executive Secretary for Justice, International Affairs, Development and Service (JID) composed the delegation.

They were joined in the visit by the Rev. Lee Hun Sam, Executive Secretary, Justice and Peace, NCCCK; the Rev. Shin Seung Min, Ecumenical Officer, Presbyterian

Church in the Republic of Korea (PCK); the Rev. Shin Bog Hyun, Ecumenical Officer, Methodist Church in Korea; and the Rev. Catherine Christie, Ecumenical Co-Worker with the PROK and NCCCK from Canada.

The delegation spent three days in Jeju Island visiting the Kangeong Village, site of the naval base project, worshipped with the Kangeong community, saw first-hand a violent confrontation between the village leaders and the police; visited the April 3 Peace Park and Memorial; and participated in an evening candlelight vigil.

During the visit, concerns were raised by the delegation on the negative impact of the naval base installation on people's livelihood, the marine life in the Island, and the potential threat to peace and human security in the Korean peninsula.

In particular, the delegation proffered that the naval base construction in the Island off the Korean peninsula will constitute an expansion of the US geopolitical and military control, countering China's growing economic and military influence in northeast Asia.

The base project will also negatively impact the farming and fishing livelihood of the Kangeong villagers and will completely destroy the marine environment in the island, which was designated as a UNESCO biosphere reserve. At the entrance of the village, the delegation witnessed a violent confrontation

Women in chains to protest the navy base.





CCA and Korean church leaders with police at proposed navy base site.

between the police and village leaders. They have also expressed concerns at the inadequate level of consultation with the community affected by the military installation.

Coming from countries which have experienced the establishment of military bases, mining projects and other transnational projects, the CCA church leaders expressed concerns about the people's loss of sovereignty, their disempowerment in the use and access to their land, and their ability to make decisions that affect their lives and security in the community.

The following recommendations were made as a result of the solidarity visit:

- to the South Korean Government to stop construction of the base;
- the US and other governments to support peace in North East Asia and promote human rights

and security in the Korean Peninsula; and to protect the environment and seek alternative models of holistic development; and

- for the churches and NGOs to pray with the Korean people, offer advocacy and solidarity support to the Korean churches and people affected by the installation.

Back in Seoul, the delegation met with leaders of the PCK, PROK and NCCK. They had lively exchanges with the Rev. Kim Jung Suh, Moderator of the PCK who grew up and lived in Jeju Island. The Rev. Kim Young Ju gave a debriefing session, and a press conference was held attended by the UCAN (Catholic News Service), the Christian Broadcasting System (CBS), and other local media representatives.

Carlos Ocampo

Call for global peace

Close to 1,000 church leaders and peace advocates confessed and renewed commitment to global peace from many parts of the world gathered at the University of West Indies in Kingston, Jamaica on 18 -



(from top) Martin Luther King, III; Dr. Muna Mushahwar; Dr. Paul Oestreicher; and Rev. Dr. Olaf Fykse Tveit.

24 May 2011, to mark the end of the Decade to Overcome Violence (DOV).

Inspired by the theme "Glory to God and Peace on Earth", worship, Bible Studies, inner-standings (seminars),

reasoning workshops, and plenary sessions were interwoven into the week-long International Ecumenical Peace Convocation (IEPC) convened by the World Council of Churches (WCC) and hosted jointly by the Jamaica Council of Churches (JCC) and the Caribbean Conference of Churches (CCC).

Daily themes that guided the deliberations were: Peace in the community so that all may live free from fear; Peace with the earth so that life is sustained; Peace in the marketplace so that all may live in dignity; and Peace among the peoples so that human lives are protected.

Keynote speakers at the opening plenary were Dr. Paul Oestreicher, a globally recognized Christian peace activist who is an Anglican priest and a Quaker and presently chaplain at the Sussex University University and Canon at Coventry Cathedral. He admonished the gathering, "Unless we change, unless the Church moves to the margins and becomes the alternative society that unconditionally says no to war, no to the collective murder that every embattled nation or tribe, every warring alliance, every violent liberation movement, every fundamentalist cause, and now the War on Terror declares to be just, until we throw the justification of war, this 'just war' theory into the dustbin of history, unless we do that we will have thrown away the one unique ethical contribution that the teaching of Jesus could make both to the survival of humanity and to the triumph of compassion."

Other notable speakers at the Convocation include Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk of the Russian Orthodox Church, Prof. Dr. Margot Kaessmann, past President of the

WCC, Dr. Martin Luther King III, human rights advocate, Executive Director of the King Center for Nonviolent Social Change and the eldest son of the late civil rights leader Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr; the Rev. Dr. Lesley Anderson, a Methodist pastor and President of the Caribbean Conference of Churches; Dr. Muna Mushahwar, a medical doctor and Palestinian Christian from Jerusalem, member of the Arab Orthodox Club in Jerusalem; Dr. Deborah Weissman, President of the International Council of Christians and Jews; Rev. Dr. Prof. Kondothra George from the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church in India and Principal of the Orthodox Theological Seminary in Kerala, South India; the Rev. Omega

contrast to or counterweight to 'just war'. We need to recognize that just in just war has nothing to do with justice but only a legitimization. We hope that the IEPC will address peace with justice as elements of the fullness of life;

- The call by the Porto Alegre Assembly for the elimination of nuclear weapons needs to be echoed in a plenary session;
- The serious limitation in dealing with issues of conflicts and war in terms of "growing violence" or "all forms of violence" need to be addressed by the Convocation;
- Peace in the marketplace is that of justice and fair trade;



Korean reasoning session at the IEPC.

Bula, Executive Minister for Global Justice and Ecumenical Relations, United Church of Canada; the Rev. Dr. Roderick Hewitt, former Moderator, Council for World Mission and currently Lecturer at the University of Kwazulu Natal, South Africa; and the Most Rev. Valentine Mokiwa, Archbishop of the Diocese of Dares Salaam.

Concerns have been raised by some ecumenical peace advocates with the WCC, among which were:

- The term 'just peace' used in

- There is need to strengthen the witness of churches and the ecumenical movement in confronting the challenges of wars and conflicts and in making peace.

Carlos Ocampo, CCA Executive Secretary for Justice, International Affairs, Development and Service (JID), assisted in organizing the Reasoning Sessions on Empire and Religious Violence: Imperative of Interfaith Solidarity, jointly with the Peace for Life Foundation on May 19; and the Churches' Efforts for a

Permanent Peace Treaty in the Korean Peninsula, a joint undertaking with the Presbyterian Church in the Republic of Korea (PROK) on May 21.

AGAPE and WCC working groups meet

Prior to the Conference, WCC working groups met, particularly the AGAPE Reference Group, attended by CCA's Carlos Ocampo on May 14 and 15. At that meeting, Dr. Konrad Raiser, former WCC General Secretary, presented the work of a group defining the greedline, placing limits on human desire, analyzing secular spirituality of consumption and identifying power, money and energy as indicators of greed. Raiser also reminded the AGAPE Reference Group members that Jesus became poor to lift the poor from their poverty and that the churches need a sober confession of what they failed to do in the Decade to Overcome Violence. The Ecumenical Water Network and Climate Change Working Groups joined the AGAPE group in a tripartite consultation that brought together ecumenical praxis that advance peace based on justice.

HIV and AIDS reasoning session

Dr. Erlinda Senturias, CCA HIV and AIDS Consultant participated as one of the panelists of the Workshop on "Securing Safe Space - HIV and Human Sexuality" on May 20. The workshop was intended to revisit the ethics of human sexuality that embrace healing and health, justice and mutuality. The panelists included Ms. Ann Hanson, UCC USA Minister of Human Sexuality, Rev. Mike Schuenemeyer, UCC USA Executive Officer for Health and

Wholeness Advocacy and Dr Senturias.

Dr Senturias shared the journey of CCA in creating a safe space for discussing HIV and AIDS in Asian Churches. CCA started on awareness building program on HIV in 1993. It took 16 years of awareness building on HIV before an official policy could be presented and approved finally by the General Committee in Bangkok on October 1, 2009. The book - "Building HIV Competent Churches: Called to Prophecy, Reconcile and Heal" was distributed to the participants. She also introduced the Benchmark Assessment Tool on HIV Competent Church developed by the Ecumenical HIV and AIDS in Africa (EHAIA) of the World Council of Churches.

The IEPC Declaration, "An Ecumenical Call to Just Peace" declares that Just Peace is a journey into God's purpose for humanity and all creation, trusting that God will "guide our feet into the way of peace" (Luke 1:79).

CCA presence in the Convocation includes the Rev. Rex Reyes, Member of Presidium; Dr. Rommel Linatoc, Member, JID Program Area Committee, the Rev. Dr. Hermen Shastri, Member, Executive Committee; together with Dr. Senturias and Carlos Ocampo.

Just Peace Companion is a comprehensive reference on the IEPC prepared by study groups reflecting on the Ecumenical Call to Just Peace, following the structure of the Call and intends to provide necessary background information as well as basic biblical, theological and ethical considerations to support and unfold the basis of peace based on justice. The Just Peace Companion can be accessed at this website - www.overcomingviolence.org

*Carlos Ocampo
and Erlinda Senturias*

*Working for global
peace locally.
Pilgrims for Peace
in the Philippines.*



Empowering the young

Pakistan faces a period of turmoil and chaos amidst its worsening political and economic condition, with a youth population dismayed and intimidated because their freedom to work for God is stifled by traditional leadership practices among different churches.

In meeting the needs of the youth, the Church and youth organizations need to understand the young people's culture and design programs responsive to their needs and nurturing them into mature, productive, and responsible God-fearing adults to become agents of social transformation.

The Christian youth in Pakistan needs encouragement and support, a favorable atmosphere and space to hone their abilities, show their talents, flourish and help build the kingdom of God. Today's youth are not the church of tomorrow; they are the church of today. God's kingdom is not age-specific. Scripture illustrates that growth belongs to God, and we who labor in God's vineyard must have the same purpose as the One with whom we are working for.

Paul wrote, "I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God made it grow. So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow. The man who plants and the man who waters have one purpose, and each will be rewarded according to his own labor. For we are God's fellow workers; you are God's field, God's building." (1 Corinthians 3:6-9, NIV)

The "SoulFuel" supports and encourages musically talented youth, and give them the venue to perform for God's worship and glory. Music is fuel for our soul and connects us to God. Various Christian concerts are organized where the youth sing and play for God's glory.

A sewing center, CUT & STITCH was recently inaugurated where young people learn sewing and embroidery skills for livelihood and thus help support their families financially. A good step towards eradicating poverty this will prevent young minds to dabble in crimes and illegal means to gain money.

A Young Women Fellowship organized recently conducts seminars and trainings to highlight and discuss issues affecting young girls like gender-based and all forms of violence, illiteracy, physical wellness and many others. Young girls are encouraged to join and trained to help other young girls in need.

Eric Attique

Ecumenically involved since 2003 when he attended the School for Ecumenical Leadership Formation or SELF in Indonesia, Eric is currently the Youth Coordinator of the Diocese of Hyderabad, Church of Pakistan.

*A youth forum.
Photo: Eric Attique*



Heeding God's call

The GKIM Youth Summit



Rev. Timotius Adhi Dharma, General Secretary of GKMI addressing the GKMI youth.

The Youth Summit (YS), a national youth camp of Gereja Kristen Muria Indonesia (GKMI or Muria Christian Church of Indonesia) on June 25-28, 2011, in Batu, Malang, East Java, Indonesia, aims to motivate the younger generation and equip them for service to God.

At the opening ceremony sermon Rev. Timotius Adhi Dharma, General Secretary of GKMI explicated the six Ds - Dream, Definition, Desire, Do, Declare, and Determination something to be possessed by the GKMI youth for personal growth. Rev. Agus Mayanto (GKMI Cempaka Putih, Jakarta) at the first he said: "Only when our relationship with God has been restored will there be something good to happen in our lives". Many young people by renewing their relationships with God.

The morning service the next day featured a modern, short play about "the younger son who had left his father". Some things hinder young people to become a new creation in Christ. They

need to overcome these things and grow in the work that God has given them. This is the message of the session "In Peace with Yourself" led by Evans Garey.

A talk show titled "Peace from Generation to Generation" led by Rev. Nindyo (GKMI Kudus) featured three GKMI figures: Rev. Peter Hiendarto, Rev. Timotius Adhi Dharma, and Risma. They discussed the origin and values embodied by GKMI as the Mennonite church of GKMI and how these values -love, peace, and the unity of all creation - apply to the GKIM youth, to Indonesia and the world right now.

Five "Kapita Seleкта" (a collection of important topics) classes on Answering the Challenges of the Internet World, Imago Dei in Practice, Youth Counseling, Youth Leadership, and Youth for Peace were also featured. The Youth for Peace is a national GKMI movement molding the youth to be peace builders in their families, schools, professions, and local churches. "Peace with Each Other" was another session led by Andy Prawira, where he stressed that we young people must try to understand and empathize with others.

The third day started with a Taize, a personal ritual to motivate and refresh minds and bodies. The second series of Kapita Seleкта classes featured topics - Getting involved with the youth movement internationally through MWC (Mennonite World Conference); Youth opportunity through MCC (Mennonite Central Committee), Youth for Mission, Youth opportunity through MDS (Mennonite Diakonia Service); and, The Environment and You: Responsible Ideas for the 21st Century.

Major and Karen Treadway introduced the participants to the youth international

exchange programs where young people serve in other countries. The IVEP (International Volunteer Exchange Program) is an opportunity for an Indonesian youth aged 18 to 30 years to serve in Canada or North America for a year, while SALT (Service and Learning Together) is a for a young person coming from Canada or North America to work in Indonesia. YAMEN! (Young Anabaptist Mennonite Exchange Network) is an exchange to countries other than America (e.g. Zimbabwe, Brazil, etc.) where participants serve in remote areas for one year.

In "Facing the Giants" session led by Rev. Agus nearly half of all young people came forward praying to God to eliminate all hurts and bitterness in their hearts. He advised the youth to no longer dwell on sins and give their best to God instead. At every end of each session is a performance of one of the eight best bands in GKMI's region. The Grand Final at the second night determined the champion band. A bonfire was also organized where we all gathered around, exuding warmth, intimacy, and unity, filling the night with singing and dancing.

At the closing ceremony themed "Answering the Call of God" with Rev. Andios and Rev. Peter Hiendarto as leader and preacher, respectively, was the advice: "When God calls do not

harden your hearts," with the background story of Jonah. Sixty-two young people committed their lives to God through a special Holy Communion around the cross with candles.

The Youth Summit closed with the band contest trophies and plaques given with loud cheers. Someday with God's powerful movement among the GKMI youth will come together again, definitely!

*Angelia Maharani Setya Putri
and Mark Ryan*

Angelia is a high school student and talented reporter for berita GKMI and a member of GKMI Sola Gratia congregation in Semarang. Mark Ryan finished from STT Abdiel (Abdiel Theological Seminary) and now is managing director of berita GKMI newsmagazine. Both are based in Semarang, Indonesia.



*A lot of fun...and re-committing
one's self to God's mission.*

Peace in the eyes of the young

Journeying towards wholeness

Under some Jamaican sunshine I learned that peace must not be understood in the context of war. Peace is a journey toward wholeness. Our economies must leave no space for the business of war; our natural resources must be protected against any purpose of war; war must not be the reason why our faith communities come to the table of dialogue; and the culture of war and violence must not have access to our communities and media. We must depart (exodus) from the current destructive and unsustainable empire run on money and oil. We are called to journey towards abundant life fully aware of a 'God of Justice'; each pilgrim embodying stewardship of the environment and of each other; and as friends.

My personal notion of peace was developed through meaningful discussions and experiences I had at the International Ecumenical Peace Convocation (IEPC) held on May 18-25, 2011, in the University of the West Indies in Kingston, Jamaica. It was a 'harvest festival' celebrating the achievements of the World Council of Churches' (WCC) Decade to Overcome Violence (DOV) which began in 2001. Peace activists, theologians, faith leaders, young adults were among the estimated 1000 participants to this profound ecumenical gathering.

Co-sponsored by WCC, the Caribbean Conference of Churches (CCC) and the Jamaica Council of Churches (JCC), it carried the theme, "Glory to God and Peace on Earth" had four sub-themes that further facilitated discussions: Peace in the Community, Peace with the Earth, Peace in the Marketplace, and Peace among the Peoples.

Around 90 young adults (IEPC stewards and participants) came two days earlier for a Youth Pre-Event. Together, we built a community; we were empowered and equipped to actively participate at the convocation. We learned about the programs of WCC such as the "Living Letters" - small ecumenical teams visiting a country to listen, learn, share approaches and challenges in overcoming violence and in peace making, and to pray together for peace in the community and in the world.

It is interesting and ironic how peace-making endeavours by Christians and non-Christians actually happen outside the four walls of our places of worship. Does this mean that our sanctuaries are not conducive grounds for peace-making? With problems within congregations and denominational hostilities over traditions and doctrines, there is actually a lot of peace-making to be done within our own households as faith-based communities. At the IEPC, there were over 160 "reasoning" workshops that became spaces to learn and share best practices in making peace from all over the world.

I visited a 'peace garden' where flowers were re-planted, blank walls painted with positive words and images of love and peace, and playtime re-claimed free from fear or violence. The peace garden is a component of HEALING: Helping Each 1 Appreciate Love Is Necessary 2 Grow, a project initiated by Donisha Prendergast, Rita and Bob Marley's granddaughter, in response to the Tivoli Gardens district killings in 2010, where soldiers seized and shot unarmed young men in 2010 in their attempt to capture alleged drug lord Christopher "Dudus" Coke. Local

residents said, however that there were close to 200 killed as against the official death toll of 73. To date, some children are still healing from the trauma of this violent event. Sumthing F.E.R.T.I.L.E. (The Sum of all Things I do is: For Every Revolutionary Truth that Inspires Leaders to Educate) is the name of Donisha's organization. At the

one another, learn from one another - radiating love, warmth, and harmony we get from the eternal, musical, Peace Maker - Jesus Christ.

Jec Dan S. Borlado



Jec Dan (on the guitar) with the youth at the IEPC.

same time it is a vision.

I believe what Donisha did is an invitation for us to re-think our approach to life, and to think of peace building as something done by believers even beyond their religious understanding and expressions. She represents a significant contribution of the youth to peace making and education for peace. She reminds us to love our neighbors as we seek to work together for peace founded in justice.

Perhaps an 'ecumenical winter' is upon us, but we can keep singing songs of justice, freedom and peace to the God of Springtime. As young people we can choose to move together, encourage

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Youth from Iran speaks

Araz Khodabakhshian (in picture) is 22 years young, representing the Armenian Apostolic Church of Iran in Program Area Committee (PAC)



of the CCA Ecumenical Formation, Gender Justice and Youth Empowerment (EGY) cluster. The largest group of Christians in Iran belongs to Armenian Apostolic Church (AAC) which became a CCA member in 2010. Christianity is a religious minority since Islam is the official religion of Iran. The world's oldest national church and one of the

most ancient Christian communities, the AAC has a youth committee taking charge of its youth program.

The youth in Iran faces problems of unemployment and low educational attainment. As Christians striving to live excelling in his love, and to contribute building world peace. Araz says that young people can overcome challenges in life by attending Sunday schools, seminars, workshops, round tables and pilgrimages, meet other young people and together share their views and find answers to their religious questions.

Her involvement with CCA links the youth of Iran to the youth of Asia. Having attended the consultative workshop and Program Area Committee (PAC) of EGY in New Delhi, India, on 9-12 February 2011, Araz shared her experiences and learned from the youth of other churches in Asia. She learned ideas in organizing workshops and other interesting activities for young people. It was her first visit to India, and she really admired the volunteer work done by young Indians to help the vulnerable.

Araz commits to help young Christians in Iran know more about ecumenism and support them in their ecumenical journey.

EASY Net Core Team Meeting

The EASY Net (Ecumenical Asia-Pacific Students and Youth Network) Annual Coordinating Team Meeting (CTM) on 5-8 April 2011 was held in Hong Kong, in which Ms Moumita Biswas, Executive Secretary of CCA EGY attended. Mr. Bipul Gonsalves Alite of Bangladesh has been appointed as Coordinator of EASY Net.

EASY Net is composed of six Asia-Pacific ecumenical youth and student organizations, namely: Asia-Pacific Alliance of YMCAs (APAY); CCA Youth, International Movement of Catholic Students (IMCS) Asia-Pacific; International Young Christian Students (IYCS) Asia Secretariat; World Student Christian Federation (WSCF), Asia Pacific; and World Young Women's Christian Association (World YWCA), Asia Pacific.

Every year EASY Net commits to celebrating the "Youth Week" which aims to bring the young people

of EASY Net member movements and partner organizations to come together to reflect on issues affecting the lives of young people and to discern their Christian praxis. CCA through EGY along with other EASY Net members have started planning the Asian Students and Youth Gathering (ASYG) to be held in India in 2012 where more than 150 students and youth are expected to attend. EASYNET is also celebrating its 10th anniversary in the ecumenical journey of strengthening the youth ecumenical movement in Asia.

On 25-31 July 2011, CCA in partnership with EASY Net and the Hong Kong Christian Council conducted an Ecumenical Creative Workshop of Youth and Students in Asia and the Pacific based on theme: Justice and Peace Now! The outcome of this workshop is a resource book for the Asia Youth Week Celebration in October 2011 which will be celebrated in CCA member churches and councils.

South Asia Christian Youth Network

The South Asian Christian Youth Network or SAYCN came into being following the 1st South Asian Christian Youth Conference in May 2002, in Colombo, Sri Lanka. It was further strengthened in the June 2005 conference in Bangalore, India attended by around 200 participants from India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Nepal and Bhutan.

Mr Kasta Dip from the Church of North India and former intern of CCA EGY was the SAYCN coordinator. To strengthen SAYCN and links with other churches in South Asia and other youth networks, Ms Moumita Biswas, Executive

Secretary of EGY represented CCA in the SACYN meeting in Bangkok in 2009. Ms Devashrie de Silva, CCA General Committee member represented CCA in the SACYN Core committee meeting held in Colombo on 1-5 August 2011, to further facilitate SACYN linkages with other member churches of CCA in South Asia and enhance ecumenical relations and networking.

CCA-EGY seeks the partnership of SACYN to network with EASY Net in organizing the Asian Students Youth Gathering to be held in India in 2012 where more than 150 youth from all over Asia are expected to attend.



Jumping high, touching the sky. SACYN Core Team and youth leaders in Colombo.

Ecumenical Youth Trekking

The Ecumenical Youth Council in Korea (EYCK) organized an Ecumenical Trekking (ET) in June 2011 participated by 12 youth leaders and students from Korea. The trek covered Chiang Mai (Thailand), Wienchan (Laos), and Hanoi (Vietnam). Aimed to build the youth capacity and spiritual formation in understanding the different dynamics of God's mission in different cultures, the theme focused on 'You are the Living Letter of Christ'.

Yoonsuk SOL, general secretary of EYCK

and Byung-chul PARK of the Korean Students Christian Federation (KSCF) accompanied the group. On July 5 they visited the CCA office for dialogue and sharing on the vision, mission of CCA and how ecumenical youth networking can be strengthened and how can EYCK help CCA mobilize the youth for the Asian Students Youth Gathering (ASYG) in 2012, where more than 150 youth leaders from churches around Asia are expected to come around the theme, 'Justice and Peace Now'.

Moumita Biswas

Dear God,

Nowadays, everyone seems to be restless, sleepless and even lifeless because of injustice, discrimination, inequality and abuse, among others.

In times like these, teach me not to resort to anger and violence. Remind me to always dwell in you, for all things are possible in your holy name.

Thank you for the gift of creativity, O God. I know that your desire is that the whole of creation would reflect your glory through peace and justice.

So as I stretch my creative wings, sing and praise you, dance for you, testify your greatness through writing, splash the colors of the world through painting and try new things, let the work of my hands honor you.

Help me to inspire other people and advocates of peace and justice with the courage to discover relevant, effective and creative strategies in promoting and achieving peace and justice.

Help me lead them beyond the fears that might hold them back and toward the individual gifts you have placed in each and everyone of us.

Amen.

Rafael Patrick Pecjo, 24
International Young Catholic Students (IYCS)
Philippines

