

Today in Juhanon Mar Thoma Hall
 10.30 am-Interfaith Perspectives on Renewal and Restoration of Creation: Dwelling in Harmony
Ven. Kekirawae Sudassana Thero
Dr. Citra Fitri Agustina, Dr. Sardar Sajjan Singh,
Dr. S.S. Bhattaraka, Charukeerthi Pandithacharyavarya,
Swami Narasimhananda, Ezekiel Issac Malekar



Asia Sunday
 Sunday 01 October
 08.00 am to 1.00 p.m.
 Worship with local congregations
 1.00 pm to 04.00 p.m.
 Churcha in CMS College,
 Marthoma Seminary
 Orthodox Theological Seminary



CCANEWS

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CHRISTIAN CONFERENCE OF ASIA GENERAL ASSEMBLY KOTTAYAM | 28 SEPTEMBER - 03 OCTOBER 2023



Dr. Mathews George Chunakkara presenting the report

Smriti Priyansha

The report of the General Secretary to the 15th General Assembly was well received by the audience. In the report, Dr Mathew George Chunakara, the General Secretary of Christian Conference of Asia shared words of welcome on behalf of the officers of the CCA and officially commenced the business session.

Due to the unfavourable COVID-19 crisis the assembly was postponed twice and it has been 8 years now since the last assembly was held in Jakarta in May 2015, and yet, by the grace of God, this assembly in Kottayam brought everyone together afresh. He asserted, "The General Assemblies of the CCA, since its second Assembly, are considered radiant mosaics, composed of the diverse hues of Asian Chris-

tian traditions, the interwoven threads of ecclesial unity leading to common action for wider ecumenism". This validates the assembly as an occasion for assessing the visible manifestation of a life together with the Asian churches.

Dr Chunakara requested the delegates to reckon the pictures exhibited as evidence of all the programs implemented by CCA in different parts of Asia to provide

an overview in the areas that CCA were working on. He declared the drastic change in the number of programs offered in the past years, earlier the CCA used to have 9 programs in 4 areas, whereas now it conducted 224 programs in 4 areas in which 9693 people from all over Asia attended.

As he concluded he reiterated the statement he made eight years ago "we need to recover our vision and passion for ecumenism, discerning in the depth of our faith. We need to recognize that as members of the Asian ecumenical fraternity, we have to grow and progress in the quest for accepting the growing reality of our common belonging and our being in Christ. Let us keep travelling to reach the goal of our common witness in unity" affirming its relevance even now.





Thematic presentation of Rev. Dr. Ferdinand Anno

Thushara Lily Manuel

Rev. Ferdinand Anno is president of the Union Christian College, La Union, and of STEP (Samahan ng Teolohikal na Edukasyon ng Pilipinas), an association of theological schools in the Philippines. He previously taught theology and worship at the Union Theological Seminary, Philippines, and was the past director of its Doctor in Ministry program. As an indigenous pastor of the United Church of Christ in the Philippines, he has served parishes in the south-western fringes of the Cordillera region.

He explains the renewal and restoration of God's creation with an illustration from an indigenous group. Through generations, indigenous peoples have established particular responses grounded in traditional knowledge, customs, and practices to different circumstances affecting their communities. These are all founded on one fundamental principle: to ensure that the whole community survives.

A common response across indigenous communities is to close off the community to all. No one is then allowed to enter or exit the community until such time as it is deemed safe. Such community closures are done for different reasons. In the Cordillera, Philippines, such practices are regularly observed during the agricultural cycle. Before or after the fields are ready for planting and harvesting, the community declares ubaya/tengaw, which basically means that everyone stays at home and no hard labour is to be done by anyone. This is a time for the community and for the earth to rest. This usually lasts for a day or two. The sign that a community is in ubaya is very simple: a knotted piece of branch or leaf at the entrance of the community. Yet it is a very powerful deterrent. When they plant this plant, they declare the land and all that dwell therein as holy and announce Jubilee for the earth and all that dwell therein. When they plant, they signal the rising of the reeds. Just like this community, we need renewal and restoration in our lives. And that renewal and restoration We need to work as a community in order to make it possible. Just like how they work as a community.

Active Discussions



Dellegates on the floor







We are in Polycrisis : Jerry Pillay

Prof. Philip Koshi

Dr. Jerry Pillay began the address by reminding us that we are living in difficult times and the world is in crisis. He described it as a “polycrisis”—accelerating climate change, Covid-19 and its impacts, conflicts, ethnic and gender-based violence, war, displacements, hunger and food insecurity, rising inequality and marginalization.

Dr. Pillay referred to what

Apostle Paul says in Romans 8:22-24—“the whole creation has been groaning in labour pains”. Today the existential threat is global and threatens the integrity of life on earth. Dr. Pillay firmly asserted that as churches and ecumenical movements we are called to respond to these global challenges especially the climate crisis. He observed that he was pleased that creation is included in the theme of this Assembly---God, Renew

Us in Your Spirit and Restore the Creation. The words Renew and Restore implies that we have lost something. Therefore we need to first speak to ourselves before we tell others what to do or not to do. The theme reflects a prayer to God the source of our help and strength to overcome our challenges.

Dr. Pillay skillfully linked theological themes to climate change and why Christians should take it seriously. He dwelt on God and creation, creation and human responsibility, The Kingdom of God and Creation, The “Kingdom” is not merely spiritual, The “kingdom of God” is not a territory but a New Order, The “Kingdom of God” is here and the “Kingdom” to come. Thus Dr. Pillay reminded that the prayer offered in this Assembly theme is that God will

restore God’s creation. However he wanted to explore how we could work with God in restoring creation. He offered concrete suggestions for the same: 1) work for justice in the world 2) build communication on love 3) We hold out hope to a broken and suffering world 4) work for peace and reconciliation.

Dr. Pillay summed up his powerful message by remarking that he had tried to reflect on our current times, especially on the global climate crisis. He offered his theological insights to Christian involvement in caring for creation and focused on the role of churches in restoring creation. Dr. Pillay concluded his lecture by exhorting all to pray by saying, “Lord, start with me and work in me and through me to restore your creation”. □

"Faith is very important"

Sr Wantihun N Kynter.

Kerry Scarlett is an ordained Deacon and part of the New Inclusive Church organizations group. She joined the new church in early 2018 and describes that at the heart of the church's vision is radical inclusion.



She belongs to the Methodist Church in Britain. It is the first time she has attended this General Assembly. She enjoys the food and is very curious to taste every food that is on the counter. She appreciates and admires the cultures and languages. She shared some of the challenges in her town the population are decreasing, more older people, and people don't care about others' life even if they don't know their neighborhood. She says that Faith is very important in everyone's heart that God's love never abandons us and he cares for us the same. She wants to encourage the young generation for their life. First and foremost to hold on to God, to come up in life, to take care of the elderly, to respect each other, to dare to speak out the justice in every respective place, and society, to be visible and open for the betterment of the church. Sheila Avnil Norris is also with Kerry Scarlett. □

Moderators Report Presented

Krishna Shaji

Bishop Dhiloraj Canagasabey, Acting Moderator, Church of Ceylon in Sri Lanka begins his report by paying tribute to the late lamented Archbishop Willem T.P Simarmata, praising his leadership and passion for the Ecumenical movement in the CCA. Amidst this heightened political, social and economic adversities in the form of global unrest such as a raging war in Europe, a dangerous sense of hopelessness in the Middle East and tragic events in Africa, Kottayam hosts the 15th General Assembly. He states that there is a "[...] spectre that threatens the well-being(Shalom) of our entire planet, which in the words of our Theme Study Document—strike at the very foundation of the creation that God created". Human greed, arrogance, and violence have inflicted incessant damage on the health of our planet upon which both human and non human lives are dependent. The two flashing red lights of recent days were the global Covid 19 pandemic and the series of environmental disasters. The pandemic resulted in the downfall of the economical conditions of billions; environmental calamities such as devastating wildfires, never seen before high summer temperatures in the Northern hemisphere, disappearing glaciers in the North and South poles, all accumulate to the drastic affectation of the "ecosystem that all living depend upon". "Jesus taught us to pray 'Thy Kingdom come on earth, as it is in heaven....' a prayer that is repeated many million times a day, in churches, homes, and other gatherings," Rt. Rev. Canagasabey resonated to all present in the session. □





Uniting Worshipers Beyond Language Barriers

**Thushara Lily Manuel,
Sundus Sali**

Music has a way of piercing into the deep parts of our soul, which assists in our expression and response to God and to the church. Singing helps unify us with the church. The gospel alone unites believers with one another. However, music is a tool that allows us to do so. The CCA choir team is an eye-catching feature of the CCA assembly.

The CCA choir team consists of members from different places and different denominational churches. It includes people from Indonesia, Korea, the Philippines, and others. They belong to different denominations, like Marthoma, Jacobites, Orthodox, CSI, and many others. The worship team includes around 50 members who belong to different churches. Every morning at 8:30, there is worship, which is based on each day's theme. The songs for worship were selected based on them. One striking fact about the choir is that even though they belong to different language groups, they worship in different languages without minding the language barrier.

Songs from different languages were included.

The CAA choir group united the people to worship in spite of language barriers. The members include both students and working people. Despite the time limit, they practiced hard to make it a wonderful experience. The choir leads the worship and encourages the people to be a part of it.

Rev. Dr. Ester Pudjo Widiasih, an accomplished educator and specialist in liturgical studies, Hailing from the Javanese Christian Churches in Indonesia, Widiasih brings a wealth of experience in the field of church music and worship to her role. Widiasih's educational journey has taken her across the globe, including studies at Drew University and the Princeton Theological Seminary in the United States, the Asian Institute for Liturgy and Music in the Philippines, and the Jakarta Theological Seminary in Indonesia. Her diverse educational background has enriched her understanding of spirituality and worship practices. At the CCA conference, Widiasih reminisced about her participation in the last CCA General Assembly held in Jakarta in 2015. This marks her second time at-

tending the CCA, highlighting her commitment to regional and international interfaith dialogue. As a member of the assembly worship committee, Widiasih has been actively involved in planning and guiding worship activities. She revealed that the team had planned in February but were disrupted due to COVID-19. "Daily, we have new symbols, and we relate to the theme," Widiasih explained. The innovative use of bamboo, a sustainable and versatile material. Widiasih and her team crafted symbols that celebrated various cultures, incorporating elements like diyas, candles, talapoli, and kuthu vilakku to represent the rich tapestry of traditions.

"This morning is about lights," she said, "so we used as much as possible different things: diyas, candles, talapoli, and kuthu vilakku." As the conference progresses, the agenda is set to embrace more diverse elements. "Tomorrow we will use spices," Widiasih disclosed, mentioning that they had recently gone shopping for these aromatic ingredients. The focus here is on thanksgiving, not just for spices but also for flowers and greenery, expressing gratitude for Earth's bountiful offerings.

Looking ahead, Monday's plan involves the symbolic use of lotus on water, a powerful image often associated with spirituality and purity. Finally, the last day of the conference will revolve around vegetables and fruits as offerings, symbolizing sustenance and unity. Ester Pudjo Widiasih's vision emphasizes the importance of embracing cultural diversity and spirituality in fostering unity among member churches.

Recalling her experience yesterday on witnessing Mohiniyattam, a classical dance form of Kerala she says it was as if the meaning of the text become alive and beautiful it reminds her of goddess of beauty. Mr. Natanael Budiman Elia (PGI-Persekutuan Gereja-gereja di Indonesia) and Rev. HYUNJU LEE (The Presbyterian Church of Korea) works for the same. Through these creative and thoughtful initiatives, the worship team continues to transcend boundaries and celebrate the beauty of human expression.



Asian Ecumenical women Assembly participants at Chaithanya pastoral centre, Kottayam.

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EDITORIAL TEAM

Editor : Dr. Paul Manalil
Convenor : Fr. Biju P. Thomas
Co-ordinator : Prof. Philip Koshi
Members :
 Silpa Ann Zachariah
 Alisha Reji
 Krishna Shaji
 Thushara Lily Manuel
 Rev. Sister Wantihun N Kynter
 Sundus Sali
 Malavika M. Nair
 Smriti Priyansha

Graphic Designer:
 Jinto K. Varghese @ Malankara Sabha

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