



Christian Conference of Asia



# God, Renew Us in Your Spirit and Restore the Creation

REPORT AND MINUTES



Christian Conference of Asia

***God, Renew Us in Your Spirit  
and Restore the Creation***

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**15<sup>TH</sup> GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF CCA**

**27 September–4 October 2023  
Kottayam, Kerala, India**

# **God, Renew Us in Your Spirit and Restore the Creation**

**Report and Minutes  
15<sup>th</sup> General Assembly of CCA**

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# Foreword

The General Assembly of the Christian Conference of Asia (CCA), the highest decision-making body of the member churches and councils in Asia, met once again, bringing together more than five hundred participants. This time, the Assembly was held in Kottayam, in the south Indian state of Kerala. The 15<sup>th</sup> General Assembly included a diverse group of participants—voting delegates, non-voting delegates, church and ecumenical partners from Asia and beyond, selected participants from pre-assembly events, accredited visitors, media representatives, stewards, and co-opted staff.

The 15<sup>th</sup> General Assembly took place from 27 September to 3 October 2023, marking the first Assembly after an eight-year gap since the last one in Jakarta, Indonesia, in 2015. The original schedule for the Assembly had been delayed due to the COVID-19 pandemic, which erupted in early 2020, postponing the gathering initially set for September 2020. Despite many challenges, the Assembly in Kottayam turned out to be a breakthrough.

Every General Assembly of the CCA is a special occasion to celebrate the faith and witness of Asian churches, reaffirm fellowship, and chart a collective path forward. It provides an opportunity to review past achievements, set future goals, and elect a new team of leaders to guide CCA's mission and programmes for the next quinquennium, typically beginning after the Assembly's deliberations. The General Assembly also offers the chance to review programmes and activities carried out between Assemblies and outline priorities for the upcoming quinquennium.

In early 2016, based on recommendations from the 14<sup>th</sup> General Assembly in 2015, CCA embarked on a new path by setting fresh programme priorities. These were further refined by the Executive Committee at its first meeting following the Jakarta Assembly. This new direction marked a milestone, as CCA adopted a new constitutional mandate and streamlined programme structure with an emphasis on enhancing ecclesial unity, encouraging dynamic Christian engagement, responding to emerging challenges, fostering interfaith dialogue, advocating for human rights, promoting peace with justice, and care for environmental stewardship.

After four years of consistent efforts to revamp CCA's programmes, the governing board decided to focus the theme of the 15<sup>th</sup> General Assembly on "God, Renew Us in Your Spirit and Restore the Creation." This theme was of great significance, as it highlighted the Christian commitment to care for God's creation amidst ongoing global crises. It called for a shift

away from exploitative practices and a renewed focus on honouring God's ownership of the earth, embracing a holistic view of creation, and aligning with God's redemptive plans. The Assembly sought renewal and restoration, envisioning a future where humanity harmoniously coexists with nature and fulfils its role as stewards of God's creation.

The setting for the 15<sup>th</sup> CCA General Assembly was multi-religious, marking the second time the Assembly had been held in India, the first being in Bangalore in 1981. Kottayam holds special significance for various Christian traditions, particularly the St Thomas Christians, who trace their origins to the Apostle Thomas' visit in A.D. 52. The town also has a rich history of Christian missionary activity, being the site of significant educational and social reforms initiated by Christian mission agencies since 1816.

The Assembly in Kottayam was a remarkable example of practical ecumenism, as it was jointly hosted by five CCA member churches from Kerala—the Church of South India, the Malabar Independent Syrian Church, the Malankara Jacobite Syrian Orthodox Church, the Malankara Mar Thoma Syrian Church, and the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church—along with the National Council of Churches in India (NCCI), a platform for ecumenical action in India with 30 member churches and several ecumenical organisations. The Assembly marked a significant milestone in the ecumenical journey of Asian churches, bringing together more than 500 participants from Asia and around the world.

This official report of the 15<sup>th</sup> CCA General Assembly provides an overview of the Assembly proceedings, including thematic presentations, reports from the General Secretary, Moderator, and Treasurer, summaries of all discussions, and reports from various sessions. It also includes reviews of the programmes implemented during the past eight years, recommendations for future programme directions, public issue statements, and decisions made at the business sessions, particularly regarding CCA's governance. It is hoped that the summary of the proceedings will serve as a helpful reference, preserving the history and significance of this milestone event in the Asian ecumenical journey.



Mathews George Chunakara  
*General Secretary*  
*Christian Conference of Asia*



15<sup>th</sup> CCA General Assembly Logo and Theme



Assembly Venue 1: Juhanon Mar Thoma Hall and Jerusalem Mar Thoma Church



Assembly Venue 2: Mammen Mappillai Hall, Kottayam



## Opening Worship



Opening procession



Ecclesial leaders from diverse traditions across Asia



Entry of worship leaders



"Beauty of God's Creation" portrayed through traditional dance and music



Prayer of Thanksgiving





Rev. Fan-Wei Liang from Taiwan lighting the lamp



Church leaders and participants



Church leaders at the opening worship







Rev. Idan Topno of the Gossner Evangelical Lutheran Church of Chotanagpur and Assam delivering the homily

## Inaugural Session



Bishop Dhiloraj Canagasabey, Moderator of CCA, lighting the lamp alongside Rev. Dr. Jerry Pillay, leaders of the host churches in Kerala, and CCA officers



CCA officers and distinguished guests at the inaugural session



## **An Overview of the 15<sup>th</sup> CCA General Assembly**

The General Assembly, as the highest decision-making body of the Christian Conference of Asia (CCA), brings together representatives from member churches and councils, along with ecumenical partners, to celebrate faith, reaffirm fellowship, and chart a collective path forward. It offers a platform to review past achievements, articulate future goals, and elect new leadership to guide the CCA's mission and programmes. Each CCA General Assembly serves as a pivotal moment to outline priorities for the upcoming quinquennium. Following the 14<sup>th</sup> General Assembly and the strategic programme directions set by the governing board in October 2015, the CCA has focused on enhancing ecclesial unity, encouraging dynamic Christian engagement, responding effectively to emerging challenges, fostering interfaith dialogue, advocating for human rights, promoting peace with justice, and advocating for environmental stewardship.

Given the ever-increasing threats of climate change, which has now escalated to the level of emergency, the Executive Committee in 2019 finalised the theme of the 15<sup>th</sup> CCA General Assembly as 'God, Renew Us in Your Spirit and Restore the Creation'. This theme held immense significance for the General Assembly as it emphasised the Christian commitment to care for God's creation amidst contemporary challenges. Rooted in the biblical assertion that "the earth is the Lord's", this theme underscored the responsibility to steward and protect all aspects of creation. It offered a momentous opportunity to address the pressing global crises exacerbated by human activity, including environmental degradation, climate change, and social inequality. Urging a shift away from exploitative practices, the theme was a call to honour God's ownership of the earth and embrace a holistic view of creation. Therefore, the 15<sup>th</sup> CCA General Assembly sought renewal and restoration in line with God's redemptive plans, envisioning a future where humanity harmoniously coexists with nature and fulfils its role as stewards of God's creation.

The setting of the 15<sup>th</sup> CCA General Assembly was the historic and multi-religious city of Kottayam in India's southern state of Kerala. This was the



second time a CCA Assembly had taken place in India, the first being in Bangalore in 1981. Kottayam is uniquely significant to different streams of Christianity. It is considered an important centre by the St Thomas Christians in India, who trace their origins to the Apostle Thomas' visit in 52 CE. Kottayam's legacy as a key centre for the Church Mission Society is also significant as it was the site of significant educational and social reforms from 1816.

The 15<sup>th</sup> CCA General Assembly was a marvellous exercise in practical ecumenism, given that it was jointly hosted by five CCA member churches from Kerala—namely, the Church of South India, the Malabar Independent Syrian Church, the Malankara Jacobite Syrian Orthodox Church, the Malankara Mar Thoma Syrian Church, and the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church—and the National Council of Churches in India (NCCI). The Assembly marked a significant milestone in the ecumenical journey of Asian churches, gathering over 500 participants from Asia and around the world.

On the afternoon of 28 September 2023, the 15<sup>th</sup> CCA General Assembly was opened and inaugurated at the Mammen Mappillai Hall in Kottayam, India. The opening worship began with a vibrant procession with symbols of light, the cross, and scripture. The congregation, accompanied by an ecumenical choir, united in song and proclaimed, "We are the household that gathers round Jesus, sharing one table, one cup, and one light." Traditional Malayalam greetings of 'Namaskaram' and the use of traditional lamps and flowers marked the entry of worship leaders, followed by a choreographed performance in classical Indian dance styles, accompanied by prayers honouring the God of all creation.

Rev. Idan Topno, an indigenous Indian woman theologian from the Gossner Evangelical Lutheran Church of Chotanagpur and Assam, delivered the homily. Drawing upon her indigenous experience, Rev. Topno highlighted the environmental crisis affecting indigenous communities, particularly the Munda, Oraon, Kharia, Ho, and Karbi tribes, whose lives are deeply connected to nature. She emphasised the threats to their natural habitat and the spiritual desolation faced by these communities.

Rev. Topno used scripture to address the spiritual void and the lack of abundant life, while also acknowledging the remnants of unspoken harmony between humans and the environment. She concluded with a call for renewal through the Spirit, urging that "the Spirit's intentions are to transform our deepest desires into a yearning for God's truth and justice, making our prayers a vehicle for this transformation."

The inauguration of the Assembly was marked by the lighting of the lamp by Rev. Dr Jerry Pillay, the General Secretary of the World Council of Churches, alongside leaders of five member churches of the CCA in Kerala and CCA officers. The CCA General Secretary, Dr Mathews George Chunakara, welcomed the participants to Kottayam and expressed gratitude to the participants, emphasising their collective commitment to the ecumenical movement and the unity of all God's people and creation. He stated, "Your presence at the 15<sup>th</sup> General Assembly proves that we continue to live up to our faith and trust in God's abundant mercies, assurances, and commitment."

The introductory remarks were delivered by the CCA Moderator, Bishop Dhiloraj Canagasabay, followed by welcome and benedictory addresses from leaders of the CCA member churches in India. These included His Holiness Dr Baselios Marthoma Mathews III from the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church, His Beatitude Dr Theodosius Mar Thoma Metropolitan of the Malankara Mar Thoma Syrian Church, Rt. Rev. Dr K. Reuben Mark, Acting Moderator of the Church of South India, His Eminence Joseph Mor Gregorios Metropolitan from the Malankara Jacobite Syrian Orthodox Church, and His Beatitude Cyril Mar Baselios, Metropolitan from the Malabar Independent Syrian Church.

Greetings were extended by Rev. Asir Ebenezer, General Secretary of the National Council of Churches in India, Rev. Dr Henriette Hutabarat Lebang, WCC President from Asia, and His Grace Dr Abraham Mar Paulos, Chairperson of the Assembly Local Host Committee. Bishop Reuel Norman Marigza, Vice Moderator of the CCA, offered the closing remarks.

The first thematic presentation on 'God, Renew Us in Your Spirit and Restore the Creation' was delivered by Rev. Prof. Dr Jerry Pillay, General Secretary of the World Council of Churches. Dr Pillay highlighted the global 'poly-crisis' encompassing geopolitical, energy, economic, and climate issues, and criticised political establishments for their inability or unwillingness to address these complex challenges. He emphasised that the Assembly theme signalled a need for transformation, both within the church and the broader world, which are plagued by injustice and corruption.

Dr Pillay underscored the theological imperative for Christians to address the climate crisis, asserting that humanity, created in God's image, had the responsibility to act as moral agents and social change leaders. He called for a focus on justice, particularly for the poor and oppressed, and for economic and ecological evaluations of policies. Dr Pillay concluded



by stressing the need for continuous prayer and divine assistance, urging participants to seek God's guidance in the mission to restore creation.

Two esteemed theologians, Dr Judy Berinai, and Rev. Dr Ferdinand Anno, delivered thematic presentations on 'Renewal and Restoration of Creation: Affirming the Will of God'.

Dr Judy Berinai, Dean of Studies at Sabah Theological Seminary in Malaysia, drew from Romans 15:5–6, emphasising the call for unity among local churches and the global body of Christ. She highlighted the fact that true unity transcends theological, doctrinal, and ethnic differences, focusing instead on living to love and please God while serving each other selflessly. This unity, she asserted, is essential for praying and acting in one accord, as renewed by the Spirit, to restore God's creation.

Rev. Dr Ferdinand Anno, an ordained minister of the United Church of Christ in the Philippines, spoke about the grassroots situation of ethnic indigenous communities in the Cordillera region. He critiqued the human-centric worldview, which he argued is rooted in a distorted Judeo-Christian cosmology and has led to a destructive mania for profit, fame, and power. Dr Anno shared the ritual of Pudong, practiced by indigenous communities in the northern Philippines, as a call to re-sacralize the earth and counter the exploitation of natural resources. He advocated for a Jubilee declaration for the earth, emphasising the need for rest, restoration, and a return to ecological consciousness.

On the second day of the 15<sup>th</sup> CCA General Assembly, CCA General Secretary Dr Mathews George Chunakara presented the General Secretary's Report and emphasised the need to revive the vision and passion for ecumenism. He called for recognising the importance of unity within the Asian ecumenical fraternity and continuing the journey towards common witness in Christ. Dr Chunakara's comprehensive report provided an account of the CCA's work, current contexts and challenges, describing the General Assemblies as mosaics which reflected diverse Christian traditions and unity of Asian churches.

The General Secretary's Report highlighted the restructuring of CCA's programmes and the adoption of a new strategic plan since the 14<sup>th</sup> Assembly in 2015, in Jakarta, Indonesia. In the eight years since then, CCA organised 224 programmes with 9,693 participants. Dr Chunakara addressed significant concerns such as the migration of Asian Christians and the sustainability of CCA amidst shrinking spaces for civil society and faith-based organisations.

The Rt. Rev. Bishop Dhiloraj Canagasabey, Acting Moderator since December 2022, presented the Moderator's Report, reflecting on global unrest, socio-political crises, and environmental degradation due to human greed and violence. He underscored the necessity of partnering with God in sustaining the integrity of creation and praised the General Secretary for his leadership over the past eight years.

The Treasurer's Report by Mr Augustine Dipak Karmakar reviewed CCA's income and expenditure trends, emphasising self-reliance and ownership of CCA by its constituencies.

The 15<sup>th</sup> CCA General Assembly offered spaces for special Deliberative Sessions on Programme Review. The participants reviewed the programmes and activities undertaken by CCA since the post-Jakarta period, spanning from 2016 to mid-2023. Meeting in groups corresponding to the General Secretariat and the four programmatic areas, participants discussed the implementation of strategic plans and a new programme structure. The sessions also considered an external programme evaluation report that had been shared earlier.

During a special interfaith panel session on the third day of the Assembly, religious leaders from Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, Jainism, and Sikhism emphasised the importance of living in harmony with creation as essential for its restoration and renewal.

Ven. Kekirawe Sudassana Thero, a Buddhist Bhikku from Sri Lanka, highlighted the need for loving-kindness and moral integrity, presenting four Buddhist principles: human morality, spiritual development, a non-attached attitude towards nature, and a balanced relationship between humans and the environment.

His Holiness Dr Swasti Shree Bhattaraka Charukeerthi Pandithacharyavarya Mahaswamiji, a prominent Jain sage, underscored tolerance and education for global harmony, elaborating on the nine fundamentals (nav tatvas) of Jainism that guide peaceful coexistence and the avoidance of bad karma.

Dr Sardar Sajjan Singh, a Sikh scholar, discussed the importance of overcoming attachments and desires through surrender to God's will, citing texts from the Jaap Sahib and Guru Granth Sahib that highlight the Sikh concept of an Almighty Creator.

Swami Narasimhananda, a Hindu monk from the Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, illustrated Hinduism's emphasis on the interconnectedness of all creation, promoting balance between nature, human needs, and spirituality.

Dr Citra Fitri Agustina from the Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) in Indonesia shared Islamic values of tolerance, moderation, consistency, and harmony, stressing a humanitarian interpretation focused on love and compassion (Rahmah).

The session, chaired by CCA Moderator Bishop Dhiloraj R. Canagasabey, provided an exchange of ideas and perspectives from different Asian religions, offering nuanced insights into dwelling in harmony with creation and advocating for interfaith actions to address the ecological crisis.

A historic milestone was achieved by CCA by hosting the inaugural Asian Ecumenical Festival (AEF) during the 15<sup>th</sup> CCA General Assembly. This festival celebrated the unity and diversity of CCA constituencies, providing a refreshing interlude amid the Assembly's deliberations and official matters.

The festival, attended by numerous ecclesial and ecumenical leaders, invited guests, and local congregation members, was inaugurated by the Chief Minister of Kerala, Mr Pinarayi Vijayan. In his address, the Chief Minister highlighted Kerala's rich Christian heritage and the global significance of the ecumenical movement. He underlined the need for a comprehensive approach to environmental and human renewal, stressing the importance of addressing the root causes of environmental destruction to ensure fruitful efforts.

CCA General Secretary, Dr Mathews George Chunakara, welcomed the attendees, noting the historical significance of the festival. He expressed hope that the AEF would become a regular feature of future CCA assemblies, marking Kottayam as a landmark in ecumenical history. The festival, he said, offered a unique opportunity to experience the vibrant cultural and ethnic diversity of Asian churches, deepening the understanding of unity in diversity.

The event was presided over by His Beatitude Dr Theodosius Mar Thoma Metropolitan, who spoke on the rich cultural heritage of Asian churches and their role in fostering unity. Other dignitaries, including Minister V.N. Vasavan, WCC General Secretary Rev. Prof. Dr Jerry Pillay, and several prominent church leaders, extended their greetings. The festival featured a variety of cultural performances by Asian churches, showcasing the rich and diverse traditions of the region.

The Asia Sunday–2023, which fell on 1 October 2023, focused on the Assembly theme, 'God, Renew Us in Your Spirit and Restore the Creation'. This allowed participants to bring the Assembly's message to over 70 local congregations in Kottayam. Participants described the opportunity

to visit local congregations and engage in their spiritual life as one of the highlights of the Assembly. They appreciated the warm welcome and the chance to connect with local Christians, experiencing the liturgical traditions of ancient Christian communities in Kerala. Members from different countries such as Iran, Australia, and Korea expressed joy in forging global and local connections, deepening their understanding of Asia's diverse Christian heritage.

The General Assembly featured engaging '*Churcha*' sessions on 1 October, facilitating ecumenical dialogue on theological missiological, social, and geopolitical issues. A common term in several Indian languages, '*Churcha*' means 'conversation' or 'discussion', and these sessions allowed participants to select from fifteen diverse topics based on their expertise and interests. The discussions, led by expert persons aimed to shape future CCA programmes and projects, with sessions held at the Orthodox Theological Seminary, Mar Thoma Theological Seminary, and CMS College in Kottayam.

*Churcha* sessions were held on the following themes: 'Responsible Stewardship and Participation in God's Mission of Renewal and Restoration of Creation' and 'Eco-Spirituality and Liturgical Innovation: An Asian Theological Appraisal'. These discussions emphasised the importance of the church's role in sustainability and renewal, and how liturgy can honour the earth. Sessions on 'Climate Crisis Mitigation and Adaptation' and 'Eco-Anxiety: Churches in Asia Engaging to Address Health and Healing' highlighted the need for churches to address climate change and provide mental health support. The session entitled 'Dwelling in Harmony with Creation: Indigenous People in Asia' focused on recognising and valuing the sustainable practices of indigenous communities.

Further discussions included 'Welcoming the Stranger: Displacement, Statelessness, and Trafficking in Persons', addressing support for refugees, asylum seekers, and trafficking victims, and 'God's Design for Life and Human Dignity: Practical Application of Bioethics', which asserted the inherent dignity of all human beings. The session on 'Resilience of Ecosystems for the Sustainability of Creation: Towards Life-Giving Agriculture in Asia' promoted sustainable agricultural practices.

The Assembly sub-theme 'Renewal and Restoration of Creation: Attaining Life in Its Fullness' was addressed by Rev. Dr Raj Bharat Patta and Rev. Prof. Dr Vicky Balabanski.

Rev. Dr Raj Bharat Patta, a prominent Asian Dalit theologian from the Andhra Evangelical Lutheran Church who is also part of the Methodist Church in the UK, emphasised that life is not exclusive to humans but

should be enjoyed by all on earth, highlighting the importance of soil in sustaining life. He discussed “de-ecologisation” characterised by un-creatureliness, un-creation, and un-creativity, all of which are the result of a human-centric worldview. He also introduced “soil theology” as a metaphor for humility and interdependence, concluding with a Tamil song ‘Enjoy Enjaami’ to illustrate the critical role of soil in human sustenance.

Prof. Dr Vicky Balabanski, Director of Biblical Studies at the Adelaide College of Divinity in Australia, also spoke on the theme. Dr Balabanski emphasised that creation is both the material and spiritual imprint of the Creator, where we experience God’s self-revelation. Citing John 10:10, she argued that the pursuit of abundant life has been misinterpreted as the accumulation of material wealth. Instead, she urged Christian leaders to shape desires towards the abundant, shared life of God, promoting ecological virtues and practices through teaching, worship, and example.

The D.T. Niles Memorial Lecture featured a powerful dramatized visual presentation by Dayabai, a renowned social and human rights activist. The lecture, held in memory of Rev. Dr D.T. Niles, focused on the plight and suffering of the victims of Endosulfan pesticide poisoning in Kerala. Endosulfan, a highly toxic pesticide, has caused severe neurological and developmental ailments among villagers working in the plantations. Dayabai, an octogenarian social activist living among the poorest communities in India, highlighted the devastating impact of this pesticide through her compelling performance. She lamented the shift from “agriculture” to “agri-business” and emphasised the interconnectedness of humans and the environment, arguing that social hierarchies contribute significantly to environmental degradation.

Dayabai’s presentation underscored the need for a balanced and holistic view of environmental health, advocating for a return to values that respect and enrich the earth. She stressed that true education goes beyond literacy, calling for parents to instill the right values in children. Through her dramatization, she vividly portrayed the suffering of children born with disorders caused by Endosulfan, ending with a poignant verse that moved the audience. Dayabai’s performance received a standing ovation, serving as a sobering reminder of the environmental and human toll of unchecked greed and profit, and calling for solidarity with those who bear the cost.

On 2 October, participants met in groups during the third deliberative session to envision future directions for 2023–2028, focusing on CCA’s

mandate, priorities, and ways to better integrate its programmes into the life of its constituencies. Recommendations included engaging CCA constituencies more comprehensively, developing leadership involving young people, conducting periodic impact reviews, and undertaking contextual biblical-theological studies on emerging concerns within and beyond Asia. Priorities also identified addressing demographic changes due to youth migration and the isolation of aged communities, peacebuilding, geopolitical advocacy, interreligious harmony, and health and healing. A significant issue was the potential relocation of CCA headquarters from Thailand due to visa and banking restrictions, with the General Assembly authorising the incoming Executive Committee to consult on alternative locations.

The fifth day of the General Assembly saw the election of three new officers and a 17-member Executive Committee for the next quinquennium. Bishop Reuel Norman Marigza (Moderator), Dr Anna Alisha Mathew Simon (Vice Moderator), and Rev. Chan Kwok-Keung (Treasurer) were elected unanimously. The Officers' team also includes the General Secretary, Dr Mathews George Chunakara, serving a second term. Bishop Marigza is a seasoned ecumenical leader from the United Church of Christ in the Philippines who brings to CCA extensive experience from his previous roles, including as the immediate past General Secretary of the National Council of Churches in the Philippines. Dr Simon, a medical doctor, has been active in the ecumenical movement in Malaysia, and Rev. Chan serves as the Dean of St John's Cathedral in Hong Kong and Honorary General Secretary of the Hong Kong Christian Council. The Officers and Executive Committee were officially installed during the closing worship of the Assembly, with their first meeting scheduled towards the end of 2023 to select the new Programme Committee.

The General Assembly took a historic step by deciding to implement consensus decision-making in all its governing and consultative bodies. The process seeks a common mind among delegates without formal voting, promoting respectful and mutually supportive dialogue while discerning God's will. This move followed a proposal by the CCA General Secretary in 2019 and subsequent preparations, including orientation sessions at the outset of the Assembly for voting delegates which were facilitated by Rev. Terence Corkin and Rev. Tara Tautari.

The General Assembly discussed and adopted statements on ecumenical responses to various emerging concerns and issues, including 'Against Increasing Militarisation in Asia', 'Australia's First Peoples Voice', 'Exploitative Extraction of Natural Resources', 'Peace in the Korean

Peninsula', 'Creation Care', 'Human Dignity and Wholeness of Life', 'Public Debt', 'Human Trafficking and Forced Migration', 'Ending Human Rights Violations in the Philippines', and 'Situation in Nagorno-Karabakh'. Each statement highlighted pressing issues, such as the plight of indigenous peoples, environmental crises due to exploitative practices, the ongoing tensions and need for peace on the Korean Peninsula, and the alarming militarisation in Asia.

The Assembly's statements emphasised solidarity and advocacy. For instance, the statement on 'Australia's First Peoples' Voice' reaffirmed the commitment to indigenous peoples' justice and reconciliation, the statement on 'Creation Care' urged CCA constituencies to prioritise strategies addressing global crises like poverty and inequality, and the statement on 'Public Debt' spotlighted Sri Lanka's economic crisis, advocating for debt cancellation to aid recovery. Through these statements, the General Assembly reinforced its commitment to addressing a diversity of critical issues affecting communities across Asia and beyond.

Church and ecumenical partners from around the world were also in attendance at the General Assembly and extended greetings during various plenary sessions. Representatives from countries including Canada, Germany, Sweden, Finland, Denmark, the USA, Switzerland, Netherlands, the UK, and Russia participated in the Assembly and Pre-Assembly events. Bishop Francis Serrao SJ, representing the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences, highlighted the long-standing relationship between CCA and FABC, likening the Assembly to the synodal journey celebrated by Pope Francis in Rome. Other greetings came from representatives such as Dn. Kerry Ruth Scarlett and Ms Sheila Avril Norris of the Methodist Church in Britain, Rev. Frida Falk of the Church of Sweden, Ms Patricia Kathryn Talbot of the United Church of Canada and the Foundation for Theological Education in South East Asia (FTESEA), Dr Andrea Maria Mann of the Anglican Church of Canada, Mr William Jansson Winge of the Church of Sweden, Rev. Dr Risto Jukko of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland, and Metropolitan Sevryuk Anton of the Russian Orthodox Church Moscow Patriarchate.

The General Assembly concluded on 3 October 2023 with a closing worship service and Holy Eucharist at the Jerusalem Mar Thoma Church. Over 500 participants, including members of the Assembly Host Committee from five CCA member churches in Kerala, attended the service. The Lima Liturgy was led by representatives from various Asian churches, with the Most Rev. Joel Ocop Porlares, head of the Philippine Independent Church

delivering a homily emphasising the importance of solidarity and the language of God's kingdom.

The newly elected Executive Committee members and officers were introduced and installed during the closing worship, led by outgoing CCA Moderator Bishop Dhiloraj Canagasabey. Prior to the worship, a concluding plenary session was held at the Juhanon Mar Thoma Memorial Hall. CCA General Secretary, Dr Mathews George Chunakara, highlighted the successful collaboration among member churches and local congregations, and the National Council of Churches in India (NCCI). The Assembly, hosted by five CCA member churches and the member council in India, received appreciation for its hospitality and committed work, with the next General Assembly scheduled for 2028.



# 15<sup>th</sup> General Assembly Schedule

Wed. 27 Sept	Thursday 28 Sept	Friday 29 Sept	Saturday 30 Sept	Sunday 1 Oct	Monday 2 Oct	Tuesday 3 Oct	Wed. 4 Oct
	Arrivals	Breakfast 07:00-08:30 Morning Worship 08:30-10:00 <b>Business Session 1</b> 09:30-11:00 • Moderator's Report • General Secretary's Report • Formation of Assembly Committees	Breakfast 07:00-08:30 Morning Worship 08:30-10:00	08:30-12:30 Asia Sunday; Worship with local congregations in and around Kottayam	Breakfast 07:00-08:30 Morning Worship 08:30-10:00 <b>General Session 4</b> 10:00-11:00 Thematic Presentations 4 Sub-Theme III: <i>Renewal and Restoration of Creation: Attaining Life in Its Fullness</i>	Breakfast 07:00-08:30 Morning Worship 08:30-10:00 <b>Business Session 5</b> 10:00-11:00 • Report of the Secretary • Nomination Committee (Final Report)	Departures
	Registration	Break 11:00-12:30 <b>General Session 2</b> 11:30-12:30 Thematic Presentations 2 Sub-Theme I: <i>Renewal and Restoration of Creation: Affirming the Will of God</i> Greetings from Ecumenical Partners	Break 10:00-11:30 <b>General Session 3</b> 10:30-13:00 Thematic Presentations 3 <i>(Interfaith Perspectives)</i> Sub-Theme II: <i>Renewal and Restoration of Creation: Dwelling in Harmony</i>		Break 11:00-12:30 <b>Deliberative Session 3</b> 11:30-13:00 Report of Programme Review (Panel) Programme Directions (in groups)	Break 10:30-11:00 Installation of new Committee/Officers Closing Worship & Holy Communion Official closing of the Assembly	
	12:30 - 14:00 Lunch	Lunch 13:00-14:30 <b>Business Session 2</b> 14:30-15:30 Treasurer's Report Director's Report Report of Credential Committee Public issues proposals	Lunch 13:00-14:30	14:30-18:00 <b>Deliberative Session</b> Church (in groups at three different venues)	Lunch 13:00-14:30 <b>Business Session 3</b> 14:30-16:00 Report of Programme Review Future Programme Directions Public Issues Committee	Lunch 12:30-14:00 Night Departures	
	15:00-16:30 Opening Worship						
	16:30-17:00 Break	Break 15:30-16:00 <b>Inaugural Session</b> 16:00-18:00 • Welcome from the President • Welcome & greetings: Church dignitaries	Break 16:30-17:00 AFI (continues) & Public Issues Memorial Lecture Chief Minister of Kerala (Chief Guest) Ecclesial and Ecumenical Dignitaries (felicitations)		Break 16:00-16:30 <b>General Session 5</b> 16:30-17:30 Public Issues Memorial Lecture <b>Business Session 4</b> 17:30-19:00 CCA Future Direction (headquarters - location) Report of Nomination Committee Evening Worship		
Evening / Night: Arrivals	18:30-19:30 <b>General Session 1</b> Thematic Presentation 1 <i>Keynote Address</i> Dinner	18:00-18:30 Greetings from Ecumenical Partners Evening Worship Dinner 19:00-20:00 Meeting of Assembly Committees	19:30-20:30 Dinner Meeting of Assembly Committees (if necessary)	18:00-19:00 Evening Worship in three different places (at Church venues) Return to Juhanon Mar Thoma Hall for dinner	19:00-19:30 Evening Worship Dinner		

## 15<sup>th</sup> General Assembly Daily Schedule

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### Thursday, 28 September

▣ **Juhanon Mar Thoma Metropolitan Hall** in the Jerusalem Mar Thoma Church Premises

- |             |   |
|-------------|---|
| 10:00–12:30 | Assembly Registration   |
| 12:30–14:00 | Lunch   |
| 13:30–14:30 | Orientation on Consensus Decision-Making Process<br>(for voting delegates only) |
| 13:00–15:00 | Assembly Registration   |

▣ **Mammen Mappila Hall**

- |             |   |
|-------------|---|
| 14:30–15:00 | Gathering at Mammen Mappila Hall  |
| 15:00–16:30 | <b>Opening Worship</b>  |
| 16:30–17:00 | Tea & Coffee Break  |
| 17:00–18:30 | <b>Inaugural Session</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Inauguration</li><li>• Welcome &amp; Greetings<br/>Bishop Dhiloraj Canagasabey,<br/>Moderator (Acting) of CCA<br/>Dr Mathews George Chunakara,<br/>General Secretary of CCA<br/>Rev. Prof. Dr Jerry Pillay,<br/>General Secretary of World Council of Churches</li></ul> |
| 18:30–19:30 | <b>General Session 1: Thematic Address</b><br>Keynote Address: 'God, Renew Us in Your Spirit<br>and Restore the Creation'<br>Rev. Prof. Dr Jerry Pillay, General Secretary,<br>World Council of Churches  |

▣ **Juhanon Mar Thoma Metropolitan Hall**

- |             |        |
|-------------|--------|
| 19:30–20:30 | Dinner |
|-------------|--------|

## Friday, 29 September

### ■ Jerusalem Mar Thoma Church

08:30–09:30 Morning Worship

### ■ Juhanon Mar Thoma Hall

09:30–11:00

#### **Business Session 1**

- Moderator's Report
- General Secretary's Report
- Formation of Assembly Committees:
  - i. Steering Committee
  - ii. Credentials Committee
  - iii. Nominations Committee
  - iv. Public Issues Committee
- Appointment of Minutes Secretaries
- Formation of Minutes Reading Team

11:00–11:30

Break

11:30–12:30

#### **General Session II: Thematic Presentation 2**

'Sub-Theme I: Renewal and Restoration of Creation:  
Affirming the Will of God'

Dr Judy Berinai, Sabah Theological Seminary,  
Malaysia

Rev. Dr Ferdinand Anno, United Church of Christ  
in the Philippines

12:30–13:00

Greetings from Ecumenical Partners

13:00–14:30

Lunch

14:30–15:30

#### **Business Session 2**

- Treasurer's Report
- Discussions
- Report of Credential Committee
- Public Issues Proposals

15:30–16:00

Tea & Coffee Break

16:00–18:00

#### **Deliberative Session 1**

Programme Review: 2015–2023 (in groups)

18:00–18:30

Greetings from Ecumenical Partners

■ **Jerusalem Mar Thoma Church**

- 18:30–19:00      Evening Worship
- 19:00–20:00      Dinner
- 20:00–21:00      Meeting of Assembly Committees

**Saturday, 30 September**

■ **Jerusalem Mar Thoma Church**

- 08:30–10:00      Morning Worship
- 10:00–10:30      Tea & Coffee Break

■ **Juhanon Mar Thoma Hall**

- 10:30–13:00      **General Session 3: Thematic Presentation III**  
Interfaith Perspectives on ‘Renewal and Restoration  
of Creation: Dwelling in Harmony’
- Buddhist Perspective: Ven. Kekirawe  
Sudassana Thero
  - Muslim Perspective: Dr Citra Fitri Agustina
  - Sikh Perspective: Dr Sardar Sajjan Singh
  - Jain Perspective: Dr S.S. Bhattaraka  
Charukeerthi Pandithacharyavarya  
Mahaswamiji
  - Hindu Perspective: Swami Narasimhananda
  - Jewish Perspective: Rabbi Ezekiel Isaac  
Malekar
- 13:00–14:30      Lunch

■ **Mammen Mappilla Hall**

- 15:00–16:30      **Asian Ecumenical Festival (AEF)**
  - Celebrations with Cultural Presentations
- 16:30–17:00      Tea & Coffee Break
- 17:00–19:30      Public Meetings:  
**Chief Guest: Hon’ble Chief Minister of Kerala,  
Mr Pinarayi Vijayan**  
Ecclesial and Ecumenical Dignitaries (Felicitations)

■ **Jerusalem Mar Thoma Church Premises**

- 19:30–20:30      Dinner
- 20:30–21:00      Meeting of Assembly Committees (if necessary)

**Sunday, 1 October**

- 08:00–13:00      **Asia Sunday**  
Worship with local congregations in and around Kottayam (including lunch)
- 13:00–14:00      **Move to ‘Churcha’ Venue**
  - CMS College
  - Mar Thoma Theological Seminary
  - Orthodox Theological Seminary
- 14:30–18:00      **Deliberative Session 2: ‘Churcha’**
- 16:00–16:30      Tea & Coffee Break
- 18:00–19:00      Evening Worship in three different places
- 19:00–20:00      Return to Jerusalem Mar Thoma Church Premises & Dinner

**Monday, 2 October**

■ **Jerusalem Mar Thoma Church**

- 08:30–10:00      Morning Worship

■ **Juhanon Mar Thoma Hall**

- 10:00–11:00      **General Session 4: Thematic Presentation IV**  
‘Renewal and Restoration of Creation: Attaining Life in Its Fullness’
  - Rev. Dr Vicky Balabanski, Flinders University, Australia
  - Rev. Dr Raj Bharat Patta, Andhra Evangelical Lutheran Church in India/Methodist Church UK
- 11:00–11:30      Tea & Coffee Break
- 11:30–13:00      **Deliberative Session 3**

- Report of Programme Review (Panel)
- Future Programme Directions (in Groups)

13:00–14:30 Lunch

**14:30–16:00 Business Session 3**

Reports:

- Future Programme Directions
- Public Issues Committee

16:00–16:30 Tea & Coffee Break

**16:30–17:30 General Session 5:** D.T. Niles Memorial Lecture

**17:30–19:00 Business Session 4**

- CCA Future Direction
- Report of Nominations Committee

■ **Jerusalem Mar Thoma Church**

19:00–19:30 Evening Worship

19:30–20:30 Dinner

**Tuesday, 3 October**

■ **Jerusalem Mar Thoma Church**

08:30–09:00 Morning Worship

■ **Juhanon Mar Thoma Hall**

**09:00–10:30 Business Session 5**

- Reports
- Nomination Committee (Final Report)

10:30–11:00 Break

11:00–12:30 Installation of New Officers and Executive Committee  
Closing Worship & Holy Communion  
Official Closing of the 15<sup>th</sup> General Assembly of CCA

12:30–14:00 Lunch  
Night Departure

**Wednesday, 4 October**

Departures of Assembly Participants from Kottayam.

# Inaugural Session

## Welcome Address

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**Dr Mathews George Chunakara**  
*CCA General Secretary*

Distinguished ecumenical pilgrims who are gathered here in different capacities to attend the 15<sup>th</sup> General Assembly of CCA and its inaugural session as official delegates, fraternal delegates, representatives of churches, ecumenical councils, observers, registered participants, visitors, specially invited guests, and church and ecumenical leaders, I greet you all and welcome you all, especially to the opening session of the 15<sup>th</sup> General Assembly of CCA.

In fact, this is a very rare and unique occasion for all of us to make visible the wider context of the ecumenical movement of which the CCA is a vital component as the coordinator, facilitator, and a privileged instrument in Asia, trying to convey the message of the unity of the Asian churches across Asia – starting from Iran in West Asia to Japan in East Asia and from Nepal in the north to New Zealand in the south.

On behalf of the Asian churches and the Asian ecumenical movement, I would also like to take this opportunity to extend special greetings and profound thanks to the five CCA member churches from Kerala — the Church of South India, the Malabar Independent Syrian Church, the Malankara Jacobite Syrian Orthodox Church, the Malankara Mar Thoma Syrian Church, and the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church — as well as to the National Council of Churches in India, which serves as the coordinating body for 30 member churches, nearly half of which are members of the CCA.

When CCA meets here in Kottayam for its 15<sup>th</sup> General Assembly to reflect on the theme '**God, Renew Us in Your Spirit and Restore the Creation**', once again, this small city or town Kottayam has emerged as a venue for an international ecumenical event. This small city of Kottayam is an important centre of the St Thomas Christians in India, an ancient Christian community and its members now belong to different St Thomas Christian churches who trace their origins to St Thomas the Apostle,

who is believed to have visited Kerala in 52 AD and established churches. Kottayam was also a centre of Church Mission Society which initiated pioneering missionary activities from 1816, such as the promotion of education among oppressed peoples, leading to a social renaissance in the region.

This small place in Kerala, Kottayam has a rich tradition of embracing ecumenism and ecumenical movement. I am telling this in the context that Kottayam, not a vibrant city by modern Indian or international standards even now, a sleeping town or a small city even today had the unique privilege of hosting the second World Christian Youth Assembly held in 1952. More than 300 young people from around the world together with some of the well-known global church and ecumenical leaders of that time, like Pastor Neimuller of Germany and the WCC General Secretary Willem A Visser 't Hooft attended the 1952 World Youth Conference here in Kottayam.

A few days ago, during my meeting with Justice K. T. Thomas, an outstanding jurist and statesman of this country, a former Supreme Court justice who, at his younger age in 1952, had served as a volunteer/steward at the World Christian Youth Conference organised by the World Council of Churches in Kottayam, narrated to me how the churches in and around Kottayam had organised the 1952 World Youth Conference in Kottayam with enormous enthusiasm. He added that it had happened when this town had only very limited facilities and much less capacity to host three hundred international guests seven decades ago.

Recalling such a context, I appreciate on behalf of the Asian churches, the commitment of churches in Kerala and many members belong to different churches clergy, lay, women, men, and youth who are taking a keen interest in welcoming all of us to Kottayam, and they have been working hard to facilitate the 15<sup>th</sup> General Assembly of CCA.

When CCA was founded in 1957, the venue was in a sleeping village Parapat in North Sumatra, Indonesia. The 1957 coming together of Asian church leaders in Prapat gave way to the founding of CCA and it became the first CCA Assembly that secured a place in the global ecumenical movement's history. Starting from Prapat 67 years ago, CCA's ecumenical pilgrimage moved forward and passed through different milestones, in 15 General Assemblies; except the first Assembly in 1957, and 11<sup>th</sup> Assembly in Tomohon in 2000, all other Assemblies were held in bigger cities or country capitals – Bangkok, Kuala Lumpur, Singapore, Penang, Bangalore, Seoul, Manila, Colombo, Jakarta, etc.

This is the second time that Indian churches welcomed the CCA Assembly to India, and now they are hosting the 15<sup>th</sup> Assembly here in Kottayam, Kerala, India. In 1981, more than four decades ago, the 7<sup>th</sup> Assembly was held in Bangalore.



The journey from 14<sup>th</sup> Assembly, which started from Jakarta in Indonesia in 2015 and reached now in Kottayam has a duration of eight years of journeying together. The 15<sup>th</sup> Assembly of CCA was originally scheduled to take place in 2020. Due to the pandemic and the lockdown situation, we had to postpone the Assembly twice. Now that when we meet here, still the world is not fully recovered from the impacts of COVID-19. However, the delegates and participants in various categories travelled miles and days to reach here. The participants here are from different continents – Across Asia, Europe, North America, Africa, and the Pacific.

Despite many challenges we are facing these days about unexpected travel restrictions imposed by some countries due to a fear of the further spread of the virus in this part of India, as well as estranged diplomatic relations that suddenly occurred among certain countries these days, most of the registered participants from overseas have arrived during the past three days.

Dear ecumenical pilgrims, your being here at the 15<sup>th</sup> General Assembly of the CCA is a demonstration of our individual and collective commitment. Your being here also shows our common obligation to contribute to strengthening the ecumenical movement which strives for the unity of all God's people, and all God's creation. Through deliberations under the theme, God Renew Us in Your Spirit and Restore the Creation, we shall affirm and reaffirm our commitments at this Assembly. Your presence at the 15<sup>th</sup> General Assembly proves that we continue to live up to our faith and trust in God's abundant mercies, assurances, and commitment.

I am sure that your participation in the deliberations in various sessions at the 15<sup>th</sup> Assembly will be a message affirming our determination to address the complex challenges affecting the integrity of the creation, and the vulnerability humanity faces at this juncture.

Let me take this opportunity to especially welcome and introduce the distinguished church and ecumenical leaders who are with us on this Dais at this inaugural session of the 15<sup>th</sup> CCA Assembly.

We feel honoured and privileged to extend a special welcome to our chief guest, the General Secretary of the WCC, who has graciously accepted our invitation to inaugurate the 15<sup>th</sup> General Assembly and deliver the keynote address.

Rev. Dr Prof. Jerry Pillay is a renowned theologian. An ordained minister of the Uniting Presbyterian Church in Southern Africa, professor of theology at the University of Pretoria where he was heading the Department of History and Ecclesiology and was Dean of the Faculty of Theology and Religion. He was elected General Secretary of the World Council of Churches (WCC) and took office at the beginning of this year. He was born into a family of Indian origin that had lived in South Africa for five

generations. Although he was born in Africa with five generations of Indian lineage, we Asians consider Dr Jerry Pillay as an Indian and an Asian who holds the highest position in the global ecumenical movement.

We are fortunate by the grace of God that he is our chief guest at this 15<sup>th</sup> General Assembly, and he will deliver the first thematic address.

Presiding over this session is Bishop Dhiloraj R Canagasabey, the Acting Moderator of CCA. Bishop Dhilo was the Presiding Bishop of the Anglican Church in Sri Lanka.

Benedictory addresses will be delivered at this inaugural session by heads of churches hosting this Assembly here in Kottayam.

His Holiness Dr Baselios Marthoma Mathews III, the supreme head of the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church, His Beatitude Dr Theodosius Mar Thoma Metropolitan, the Supreme head of the Malankara Mar Thoma Syrian Church, His Beatitude Cyril Mar Baselios Metropolitan, the supreme head of the Malabar Independent Syrian Church, His Grace Joseph Mor Gregorios Metropolitan, the Secretary of the Synod of the and the Metropolitan Trustee of the Malankara Jacobite Orthodox Syrian Church, and Rt Rev. Dr Reuben Mark, the Deputy Moderator of the Church of South India will offer benedictory addresses.

Offering special greetings and welcome at this session will be by His Grace Dr Abraham Mar Paulose Episcopa, chairperson of the CCA Assembly Local Host Committee, Rev. Asir Ebenezer, General Secretary of the NCCI, and Rev. Dr Henriette Hutabarat-Lebang, President of the WCC from Asia region. Closing remarks will be by Bishop Reuel Marigza, Vice Moderator of CCA and who was General Secretary of the United Church of Christ in the Philippines.

Numerous church and ecumenical leaders who have been associating with WCC, CCA, NCCI and member churches of these ecumenical bodies are present at the inaugural session of this 15<sup>th</sup> General Assembly. I welcome each and every one of you to this historic Asian ecumenical event.

I welcome all of you again. Thank you for being with us.

## **Greetings from the Assembly Local Host Committee**

**Rt Rev. Dr Abraham Mar Paulos**

This is the day God has made for us. We, as the organising committee, have been waiting for this wonderful moment. For the last months, we have been working under the able leadership of our host churches. All

the heads of host churches are present here; that shows how much importance we have given to this great ecumenical pilgrimage. The whole of Asia is present in this beautiful auditorium.

This is an honour to all the members who have gathered here—a person of his sort spending this whole time with us and leading us through. So, this is a very joyous occasion for all of us. Church leaders, bishops, present here show that this is a united effort to make this 15<sup>th</sup> Assembly a wonderful ecumenical experience.

These five days are meetings after meetings. But for us, the organising committee, the process was really an enriching and learning experience. It was a lived experience. You know, living together is the most difficult proposition. When it comes to the question of various traditions, cultures, and histories, it becomes more difficult. But by the grace of God, we have been making headway to organise this conference for the glory of God and the furtherance of the kingdom of God.

I am so privileged to welcome all of you to Kottayam, my hometown, and I can see the joy and jubilant mood of all who have gathered here to be part and parcel of this great experience. You look at the dais, eminent church and ecumenical leaders, very jubilant people in the journey of the ecumenical world—giving all kinds of support, encouragement, and leadership. I'm sure this will be a history-making Assembly as far as the CCA is concerned. In the coming days, God will definitely shower heavenly blessings upon us, and we will be a great blessing to the whole of Asia in particular and, in general, to the whole world.

When we live together, we can do wonders. The world is facing a lot of difficulties. Every country is facing difficulties. We don't know how to address all such difficulties, but I'm sure when we stand together, pray together, and do things together, we can make an impact in every occasion, in every country, and that will be a great help to people at large.

That is our prayer, that is our expectation—to bring out blessings to the whole people of this little town, the people of this little God's own country, Kerala, and this multifaceted Indian subcontinent and Asia, by and large.

May God bless you all, and I am looking forward to meeting you, each and every person, in the coming days.

On behalf of the organising committee, we are very glad to receive you in our churches, in our homes, and in this town, fully open to all participants. This is your town—feel at home.

May God bless you. Thank you very much.

## **CCA Moderator's Remarks and Greetings**

**Rt Rev. Dhiloraj Canagasabey**

Your Beatitudes, Your Eminences, Your Graces, our chief guest, The Rev. Dr Prof. Jerry Pillay, the General Secretary of the World Council of Churches, heads of churches, secretaries of National Christian Councils, all pre-assembly participants, guests, and ecumenical partners, I greet you in the precious name of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

You have come from your own situations. The context could be different, painful, and we have come here with our stories of failures and stories of our successive attempts in our faith journey. Above all, we have come here as wounded people. Why do I say this? God has called us to exercise proper stewardship on all that He created for us—humans, as well as all creatures and the environment. But because of our failure, our greed, because of our negligence, we have wounded ourselves by wounding that which God gave us in trust.

So, my dear participants, bring your stories, bring your wounds, bring your pain of heart and mind, and lay it at the feet of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, asking the Lord to heal us with his Spirit and restore the whole of His creation.

I wish you all a blessed Assembly. Make friendship sacred and holy with one another, and journey on with boldness and courage, hoping in Christ, into a future that may seem to be dark and fearful.

May God bless you all.

## **Greetings from the World Council of Churches**

**Rev. Prof. Dr Jerry Pillay**  
*General Secretary*

Your Eminences, Moderator, and General Secretary of the CCA, church leaders, dear sisters and brothers, it is really my honour and privilege to bring greetings to you on behalf of the World Council of Churches.

Joining with me in bringing greetings to this assembly are 352 member churches from 120 countries around the world, with almost 600 million members. It is my joy to represent that community and to bring greetings to this particular Assembly.

The CCA is deeply valued and precious to the global ecumenical movement. It is not only the oldest regional ecumenical organisation in the world, having been established as the East Asia Christian Conference in 1957, it represents a continuing, dynamic, and transformative movement. This fellowship brings together 99 churches from all across Asia and

contributes significantly to the global ecumenical movement. WCC has 76 member churches from Asia, and almost all of these churches, I am pleased to say, are members also of the CCA.

The Christian Conference of Asia Assemblies have been a very significant signpost in the life of Asian churches. Since the first Assembly in 1959, significant impulses for unity in mission, witness of prophetic action have emerged as significant messages from these gatherings. During these days, as you meet and gather here, you make visible expression and evidence of continuing to carry the cross together in Asia, serving together with resilience and faithfulness, giving a common witness to contemporary challenges in this particular part of the world. Now, you are setting a new signpost to show where you are and to reflect and to plan where you are going to.

During this critical period, when communities and creation are facing several existential crises, it is pertinent that you have selected as the assembly theme: “God, Renew Us in Your Spirit and Restore the Creation.” This is indeed a very significant theme.

The WCC has also decided to continue with its Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace and Unity. However, as we move into the next eight-year cycle of the council’s work, we continue with the pilgrimage, but this time we call it the Pilgrimage of Justice, Reconciliation, and Unity. We have just drawn up a new strategic plan, that was adopted by the Central Committee in June this year, and we are now actively working on an implementation plan. I am pleased to say that in this new implementation plan, there is a very definite role for collaboration and participation with regional ecumenical organisations. In this respect, we hope to work more significantly with the Asian context.

We need to work together to establish more unity and strength, and we look forward to working together. What we need is collaboration and cooperation, not competition and isolation.

For indeed, as Christians, we are stronger and better together, especially as we seek to fulfil the common mission of proclaiming Jesus Christ to the world, both in word and in deed. In this current context in which we find ourselves in the world, facing so many different challenges, the Asian context—mostly where Christians work and witness as a minority religion—offers much for us to learn, especially in the areas of interreligious dialogue and partnerships.

The WCC looks forward to continuing and deepening our partnerships with you. We wish you well in this Assembly and pray that you will be directed by the presence and power of the Holy Spirit as you discern and decide the way forward in the continued work and witness of the CCA from this Assembly onwards.

It is my pleasure and joy to be with you. God bless you.



Dr Mathews George Chunakara,  
General Secretary of the CCA



Rt Rev. Dhiloraj Canagasabey,  
Moderator, CCA



Rev. Prof. Dr Jerry Pillay,  
General Secretary, World Council of Churches



His Holiness Baselios Marthoma Mathews III Catholicos,  
Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church





His Beatitude Dr Theodosius Mar Thoma Metropolitan,  
Malankara Mar Thoma Syrian Church



His Eminence Joseph Mor Gregorios Metropolitan,  
Malankara Jacobite Syrian Orthodox Church



The Rt. Rev. Dr K. Reuben Mark,  
Acting Moderator of Church of South India



His Beatitude Cyril Mar Baselios Metropolitan,  
Malabar Independent Syrian Church



Rev. Dr Henriette Hutabarat-Lebang,  
President of World Council of Churches from Asia



Bishop Reuel Norman Marigza,  
Vice Moderator, CCA



His Grace Dr Abraham Mar Paulos, Chairman,  
CCA Assembly Host Committee



Rev. Asir Ebenezer, General Secretary,  
National Council of Churches in India

## **Benedictory Address**

**His Holiness Baselios Marthoma Mathews III Catholicos**

*Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church*

Glory be to the Almighty God. Your Eminences, esteemed delegates, respected clergy, and dear friends. It is with immense joy and profound gratitude that we stand before you today as we come together at the 15<sup>th</sup> General Assembly of the Christian Conference of Asia, hosted for the first time in this enchanting land of Kerala, in the historic city of Kottayam, called the land of Letters, Latex, and Lakes—because of its high literacy, rubber plantations, and the Vembanad Lake.

Most of India's natural rubber originates from here. Kottayam is the hometown of a vast number of vernacular newspapers, books, and periodicals. Sometimes entitled as the "Rome of the East," Kottayam is the main Christian centre in Kerala, renowned for its churches and houses built in colonial style. Kottayam is known for its religious harmony. There are over 50 temples and 70 churches, including a thousand-year-old mosque, in this vicinity.

Our gathering here is especially significant, hovering over the theme of this conference: "God, Renew Us in Your Spirit and Restore the Creation." The theme of this conference is both timely and profound. It beckons us to examine our faith and our responsibilities in the face of a world that yearns for renewal and healing.

Recent incidents in the social, cultural, and religious landscape of Asia have challenged our resolve and called us to be agents of change. We must, as followers of Christ, seek to renew ourselves in the Spirit and actively engage in the restoration of God's creation, addressing issues such as environmental degradation, social injustice, and religious tolerance.

The Malankara Orthodox Church has a rich history of ecumenical engagement, dating back to our early involvement in the World Council of Churches, the Christian Conference of Asia, National Council of Churches, and many more ecumenical forums. Our commitment to promoting unity and dialogue among Christian denominations remains unwavering.

The Malankara Orthodox Church was a founding member of the World Council of Churches. His Holiness Catholicos Baselios Geevarghese II and other Metropolitans participated in the 1937 Conference on Faith and Order in Edinburgh.

A church delegation participated in the 1948 WCC meeting in Amsterdam, and the church played an important role in the 1961 WCC conference in New Delhi. Metropolitan Dr Paulos Mar Gregorios was president of the

WCC from 1983 to 1991. The church participated in the 1965 Conference of Oriental Orthodox Churches in Addis Ababa. It's a member of the Faith and Order Commission, the Christian Conference of Asia, and the Global Christian Forum.

Our voice in ecumenical forums underscores its dedication to fostering understanding and collaboration among diverse Christian traditions. The Malankara Orthodox Church's partnership with the Christian Conference of Asia signifies its commitment to a united Christian voice across Asia. Through the CCA, the church has nurtured relationships with fellow believers, embracing the diversity of tradition and cultures while celebrating the shared foundation of Christian faith.

We are glad to recollect the participation of the Malankara Orthodox Church in the very first meeting of the East Asia Christian Conference, which was the first format of CCA in 1957 at Indonesia, attended by a delegation from the Malankara Orthodox Church headed by His Grace Mathews Mar Coorilose, who later became Catholicos His Holiness Baselios Mar Thoma Mathew II of Blessed Memory. Thereafter, starting from Metropolitan Dr Paulos Mar Gregorios to Metropolitan Dr Yakoob Mar Irenaios, who is presented here, represented the church in various meetings and committees of the CCA.

This platform has provided opportunities for the church to contribute its theological insights and work towards common goals, transcending denominational boundaries. In an increasingly interconnected world, we must continue to strengthen our ecumenical relationships and work collaboratively with our brothers and sisters in Christ. Together, we can more effectively address the pressing challenges of our time and bear witness to the reconciling power of the Gospel.

We appreciate the CCA, which represents 52 million Christians spread across Asia, for its phenomenal role in upholding the rights and liberty of the Christians participating and practicing their faith in different countries of Asia.

As we contemplate the challenges facing Christian churches in Asia and within the Indian context, we are acutely aware of the complex issues that demand our attention. From religious persecution to economic disparities, our Christian communities face adversity on multiple fronts. It is with profound grief that we reiterate our solidarity with our Christian brothers and sisters of Manipur, who are brutally and inhumanely treated. It is incumbent upon us to address these issues with courage and conviction, advocating for justice, peace, and religious freedom. We must also be mindful of the unique challenges faced by Indian Christians and work collaboratively to foster harmonious co-existence in this diverse and pluralistic society.



In a world marked by division and strife, the unity of the Church is a powerful witness to the transformative power of the Gospel. It is imperative that we, as Christian churches, unite in our efforts to address the pressing global issues of our time, including poverty, environmental degradation, and social inequality. By combining our resources, wisdom, and compassion, we can make a meaningful impact on the lives of those who are marginalised.

Let us remember Christ's call to love our neighbours and work together for the betterment of the world through a renewed vision of global brotherhood.

Before we conclude, we wish to express our profound appreciation to the organisers of this 15<sup>th</sup> General Assembly of the Christian Conference of Asia. Your dedication and hard work in bringing us together in this sacred place are commendable. Kottayam, the headquarters of the Malankara Orthodox Church, stands as a symbol of our commitment to unity and ecumenism. We are deeply grateful for your efforts in making this gathering possible.

Let us remember that we are called to be the salt and light of the world, agents of renewal and restoration in God's creation. May our time together at this conference inspire us to renew our spirits, re-strengthen our resolve, and work tirelessly for the restoration of God's creation. May God bless our deliberations and guide us in our shared mission of bringing hope, healing, and reconciliation to Asia and the world. Thank you and may God's grace be with us all.

## **Benedictory Address**

**His Beatitude Dr Theodosius Mar Thoma Metropolitan**

*Malankara Mar Thoma Syrian Church*

Good evening, everyone. When I walked into this auditorium, all were in a very celebrative mood. Now, we have come to the solemn occasion of inaugurating the 15<sup>th</sup> Assembly of the Christian Conference of Asia.

The Moderator of CCA who is presiding this meeting, Bishop Dhiloraj Canagasabey; the General Secretary of the World Council of Churches, Prof. Dr Jerry Pillay; Dr Mathews George Chunakara, the General Secretary of CCA and all the dignitaries on the dais, all the bishops, clergy, brothers, sisters, and friends—I am extremely happy and privileged to greet you and welcome you on behalf of the Malankara Mar Thoma Syrian Church, in the name of the Triune God.

This is indeed a unique opportunity for the churches in Kerala, as you have given us the privilege to welcome you to Kottayam, this historic city of ancient Christianity in Asia.

Friends, we are extremely happy and excited that all of you, as representatives of numerous churches and national ecumenical councils from across Asia and beyond, are with us as participants of the CCA General Assembly. Your presence in our midst in the coming days will enrich us, and we are happy and proud about it.

I take this opportunity to appreciate the CCA officers and the executive committee, especially Dr Mathews George Chunakara, for their leadership and thoughtfulness in coming to India and providing an ecumenical space for the churches here to work together for hosting the CCA General Assembly—first time in Kerala and second time in India. It is our privilege and honour to serve you and reciprocate your generous hospitality and warmth the Indian churches enjoyed in the past CCA Assemblies and other Asian ecumenical events during the past several decades.

I also appreciate the hard work of the local host committee team for their dedication and commitment in organising this Assembly here in Kottayam. As the leader servant of the Malankara Mar Thoma Syrian Church, I am especially happy that the Mar Thoma Church, a founding member of the CCA, has been part of CCA's ecumenical journey ever since its founding in 1957. Since 1957, all my predecessors and most of my brethren bishops—who are now present over here—have been part of CCA's ecumenical journey, and they were able to attend several other previous CCA Assemblies as they were delegates of the Mar Thoma Church in the previous Assemblies. I am sure they, too, cherish the value and significance of CCA General Assembly, which happens once in five years.

My own participation with several of you who are present here from different parts of Asia at the last Asian Church and Ecumenical Leaders' Conference held in Jakarta, Indonesia earlier this year was enriching. The joy of our ecumenical journey multiplies when we meet again at different times and in different places. Every ecumenical event we organise and come together for reminds us of the need for strengthening ecumenism and dialogue among Christians, as well as dialogue with other religions and ideologies.

I am a student of religion, and therefore, I want to emphasise dialogue with other religions in all ecumenical gatherings. Such dialogues help us to ponder upon various issues—problems affecting our societies and communities at large. The theme of the 15<sup>th</sup> CCA Assembly, "God, Renew Us in Your Spirit and Restore the Creation," is a very important contemporary global issue with significance at local levels, in which our attention is needed in manifold ways. Certainly, we will be spending these days pondering upon the theme.



We need opportunities for such dialogues, especially from our Christian faith and theological perspectives. The problems they face now, as the entire creation is suffering due to the vulnerabilities of ecological and environmental imbalances and distortions, affect millions and millions of people around the world, especially in almost all Asian countries. The theme of the fifteenth assembly implores us to reflect on the ecological challenges we face, that are urgent and existential. It also reminds us that, when we are called to resonate in the Asian context, we are called to affirm our spiritual and ecological commitments—to embrace a more harmonious and sustainable world where the integrity of all God’s creation is upheld and valued.

Let us heed the call of ecumenism, acknowledging that the renewal of our spirits and the restoration of creation are intertwined. Let us work together across religions and cultural boundaries to address the pressing challenges of our time in renewing and restoring creation. For it is in unity that we need to find hope in action. Through our collective efforts, we manifest the divine spirit that renews and restores the world. May our journey towards participation in God’s mission of renewal and restoration of all God’s creation be blessed with wisdom and compassion, as we embrace the divine spirit that unites us all.

Dear friends, once again, a very hearty welcome to Kottayam and to Kerala. May this conference be a very enriching, at the same time, contributing conference for all of us, thereby enabling the various church denominations in this land to grow spiritually and ecumenically.

Thank you. God bless you all.

## **Benedictory Address**

**Rt. Rev. Dr K. Reuben Mark**  
*Church of South India*

Very warm greetings to you all from the Church of South India. On behalf of the Synod officers, the bishops, and the 4.45 million members of this great church, I greet all the dignitaries on the dais and the friends gathered in this lovely hall.

A child that was born on 27<sup>th</sup> September 1947 is the Church of South India—born as an ecumenical church, the day when the episcopal and non-episcopal churches got together – the Presbyterians, Congregationals, Anglicans, and Wesleyan Methodists – formed as a church and journeyed for 76 years. Now, in its seventy-seventh year, sailing from height to height, from glory to glory. This church is not only a growing church but also a glowing church. It stands as a united and

uniting church, known as an indigenous, open, and borderless church. It remains vibrant because of its seven lovely departments and two boards.

Especially as this Assembly reflects on the theme “God, Renew Us in Your Spirit and Restore the Creation,” this church takes pride in being the first church that has an ecological department in the country, and today it is a renowned department all over the world. This largest church in the most populated country in the world, it is a church committed not just to the four walls of the Church but taking the Lord to the grassroots level for the people to experience that God is with us.

To all these lovely CCA members, on behalf of this largest church, my wish and prayer is that all of us who have gathered here in these first few days not just remain as people discussing and hearing. But, commit ourselves before we leave this place to put all that we have heard and spoken into action that the communities in this world may experience God is with us.

Christian Conference of Asia, be assured that this largest Protestant church in India—within the largest populated country in the world, with a large heart—will journey with CCA hand in hand that all the dreams and visions of the CCA come into reality.

God bless you all. Thank you.

## **Benedictory Address**

**His Eminence Joseph Mor Gregorios Metropolitan**  
*Malankara Jacobite Syrian Orthodox Church*

A very good evening to one and all. Greetings in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Heads of the churches, Your Eminences, our chief guest of the day, WCC General Secretary Prof. Dr Jerry Pillay, Bishop Dhiloraj, Moderator of CCA, CCA General Secretary Dr Mathews George Chunakara, priests, deacons, honourable delegates, and brothers and sisters. It is my great pleasure to welcome and greet each and every one of you on behalf of the Jacobite Syrian Orthodox Church. With great joy, let me acknowledge the presence of two eminent leaders of ecumenism and Christianity—who are none other than Dr Jerry Pillay, the General Secretary of WCC, and Dr Mathews George Chunakara, the General Secretary of CCA.

Invariably, we recollect with gratitude the incredible contributions of WCC and CCA towards the unity of churches and addressing the global challenges that have always confronted humanity and nature. With honour and delight, I wish to affirm that this event shall be recorded in golden letters in the secular and ecclesiastical history of India and Kerala. Alongside this, we retrospect the rich impacts and reminisce about the conduct of the previous Assembly in Jakarta with overwhelmed hearts.

It's gratifying to know that we, the privileged delegates here, hailing from various churches, cultures, and different nationalities, have joined hands by the grace of God, and have made it together once again, to be linked with winning lines in view of establishing peace and unity through collaborative exchange, greater understanding, knowledge, enlightenment, and edification, and by arriving at a pragmatic resolution. As we look at it, on one hand, this will be an enriching experience to widen our ecumenical horizons. On the other hand, it is a platform that provides us insights on practical and amicable strategies to be implemented in order to overcome the established obstacles and barriers that primarily prevent us from being united in one body of Christ. Hence, we give an authentic witness in a religiously pluralistic Asia—to be the voice of the voiceless, and finally, to preserve the beautiful creation through holistic approach.

We passionately touch the surface of the moon but often show negligence to touch the hearts of our grieving next-door neighbour. We fail to hear the cry of the poor, as also of Mother Earth, who has been victimised through human interventions and exploitations. The theme of the Assembly reminds us of this supreme reality. May the Holy Spirit renew our hearts and thoughts, and through our mindful and meaningful deeds, help us restore the creation, so vast and so vivid.

Let me conclude with a quote from the WCC Canberra Assembly held in 1991: "We need desperately a mobilising portrait of reconciled life that will hold together an absolute commitment to the unity and renewal of the church and an absolute commitment to the reconciliation of God's world. We need to affirm the vision of an inhabited world based on values that promote life for all."

May I conclude with my best wishes for the success of this meeting. Have a very good evening. Thank you. God bless.

## **Benedictory Address**

**His Beatitude Cyril Mar Baselios Metropolitan**

*Malabar Independent Syrian Church*

Beloved bishops, esteemed guests, beloved members of the Christian Conference of Asia, brothers and sisters, I stand before you today with immense joy and gratitude as we come together to celebrate the 15<sup>th</sup> Assembly of the Christian Conference of Asia. It is truly a remarkable milestone in our journey of faith and unity. Our theme for this year's Assembly, "God, Renew Us in Your Spirit and Restore the Creation," is

not just a collection of words but a profound call to action. It reflects our shared commitment to being stewards of God's creation and the renewal of our spirit through the transformative power of His Holy Spirit. In a world that often seems marked by division, turmoil, and environmental challenges, we, the Christian community in Asia, come together as a shining beacon of hope. We gather not only to discuss and deliberate but to renew our faith, our hearts, and our dedication to the teachings of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The words of Isaiah 40:31 remind us, "But those who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint." As we reflect on this theme, may we draw strength from the One who renews us, sustains us, and empowers us to bring positive change in our communities and the world around us. Through the power of God's Spirit, we find the inspiration and strength to heal the wounds of the earth, to mend the divisions among us. As we gather here, we are reminded of the words of Psalm 104:30, "When you send forth your spirit, they are created, and you renew the face of the ground."

Let us be instruments of this renewal, both in our individual lives and in the collective life of our Christian community. May the spirit of unity, love, and dedication that permeates this assembly continue to inspire us long after we depart from this place. Let us go forth with renewed hearts, empowered by the Holy Spirit, to be agents of change and transformation in our communities and in the world.

Thank you for your commitment to this conference and for being a part of this significant moment in our journey of faith. May God bless us abundantly as we strive to renew our spirit and restore His creation. God bless you all, and may His grace and peace be with us throughout this Assembly and beyond. Thank you.

## **Felicitation**

**Rev. Dr Henriette Hutabarat-Lebang**

*President, WCC Asia Region*

Respected church leaders, sisters and brothers in Christ, this is the day that the Lord has made. Let us rejoice and be glad in it. Indeed, this is a joyful time for us, the churches in Asia, as God has opened an opportunity for us, in God's own time, to meet together in this 15<sup>th</sup> General Assembly of the Christian Conference of Asia, which has been postponed for three years due to the COVID-19 pandemic that hit almost all places in the world.

On behalf of the Asian churches, let me express our deep appreciation to the leadership of the CCA 2015-2023, who have facilitated us, the Asian

churches, to implement our common commitment from the Jakarta Assembly to this Kottayam Assembly—namely, to live together in the household of God in the midst of many challenges that we are facing in the time of pandemic and as an integral part of a pluralistic society in Asia.

On behalf of the Asian churches, let me welcome the General Secretary of the World Council of Churches, Rev. Prof. Dr Jerry Pillay, for your visit to Asia. We do hope that we will see you more in Asia in the future to strengthen our collaboration, our fellowship, and our unity with the churches around the world.

On behalf of the Asian churches, let me also express our deep appreciation to the hosts of this Assembly—the five churches in Kerala: Malankara Mar Thoma Syrian Church, Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church, Malankara Jacobite Syrian Orthodox Church, Malankara Malabar Independent Syrian Church, and Church of South India, together with the National Council of Churches in India. It is indeed our joy that you have enabled us, the Asian churches, to meet in this place after eight years to have our Assembly. This is an opportunity to strengthen our fellowship and our commitment to work together for the renewal of all God's creation.

I hope we, the representatives of Asian churches, can learn more about the rich tradition of the Saint Thomas traditions of this land. I hope, during our stay here, we will be able to engage with the sisters and brothers in this land. A special thanks for the hard efforts made by the NCC India to facilitate the visas for all of us who have come from different countries in Asia, making our travel to Kottayam easier. Thank you, sisters and brothers, and member churches in Kerala, for your warm hospitality, which is a great manifestation of our unity in Christ to serve the world with the care and integrity of creation.

Friends, participants of the Assembly, let us use this opportunity to strengthen our relationships, to know each other better, and, as we know, to face the unprecedented environmental crises of today. We are committed to coming here to pray together: "God, Renew Us in Your Spirit and Restore the Creation." Along with our prayer, it is our task in this Assembly to reflect and plan together—how do we, as churches in Asia, facilitate the local churches in Asia to participate together with global churches in the effort of renewal and restoration of creation that has been exploited by many people.

Special thanks to the staff of CCA, the stewards, and to the many people who have laboured hard for the success of this Assembly, we, the Asian

churches, express our deep appreciation to you all. May God bless us in this Assembly.

Thank you.

## **Felicitation**

**Rev. Asir Ebenezer**

*National Council of Churches in India*

Moderator and officers of the Christian Conference of Asia, Rev. Prof. Dr Jerry Pillay, General Secretary of the Christian Conference of Asia, heads and representatives of churches, councils, and ecumenical organisations in Asia and India.

I join my colleagues, secretaries, and staff of the National Council of Churches in India in offering you our greetings on behalf of its leadership.

The National Council of Churches in India brings together 32 national churches joining with other 43 national organisations. Together with the Catholic Bishops' Conference of India and the Evangelical Fellowship of India, the Christians in India form about 40 million in this vast country.

We work through six commissions and two autonomous bodies, helping churches to be safe spaces for children, working on gender equity, just peace, disability inclusion, affirmation of gender and sexual diversity, dismantling caste, and working through issues of Dalit Christians, lifting up issues and concerns of indigenous communities, working on climate emergencies and climate refugees, migration, and economic empowerment through the new international financial economic architecture.

We thank God for your ministries of public witness in different parts of this great, rich and diverse continent. We thank Dr Mathews George Chunakara and the leadership of the CCA leadership for bringing this ecumenical event to this country for the second time.

A deep appreciation for the Government of India, particularly the Ministry of External Affairs and the Ministry of Home Affairs, for facilitating your presence here. It is a remarkable achievement that 358 visas were processed efficiently, and we appreciate the contributions of Prof. P.J. Kurian for guiding us through the process.

Over the next days, let us look forward to encourage each other in faith, engage with the complexities of our context, and seek wisdom in the light of God's Word as we plead for renewal in God's Spirit, in order that the creation may be restored.

May God's blessings be upon us all.



## Vote of Thanks

**Bishop Reuel Norman Marigza**

*Vice Moderator, CCA*

My highest respects to the church leaders at the dais. Sisters and brothers, friends, ecumenical partners, accompaniers, and guests, and everyone here assembled.

We have been lavishly welcomed and profusely greeted. We have been, and will continue to be, fed and nourished in body and in spirit. On behalf of the outgoing Executive Committee, as well as the delegates gathered here from outside India, we express the heartfelt gratitude of our hearts for making our Assembly truly ready and fully prepared. We thank the National Council of Churches in India for their work thus far and in the following days.

It is now our turn to respond to the wonderful and warm hospitality of the churches in Kottayam and the State of Kerala, headed by our Eminences, the Beatitudes, Metropolitans, bishops, church leaders, and church members. As delegates, let us say to our hosts: we may never be able to fully repay what you have done for us, but we promise to respond to your work and hospitality by diligently fulfilling the tasks and duties of the Assembly entrusted to us by our respective churches and councils.

We pray that the good Lord bless the labour of our hands, the work of our minds, and the desires of our hearts—that we may truly and faithfully become witnesses to God’s renewing power in the Spirit and in restoring creation. As the hymn goes, “To the work, to the work” may I invite you to join me in a word of prayer.

To you, our God—Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer—as we close this inaugural session and move to the keynote address on the theme, we give thanks for your sustaining grace and your empowering Spirit. We return to you all the glory, honour, and praise, even as we dedicate ourselves in this Assembly to hear and listen to your will.

As we listen to the cries of the people and the groaning of your creation, as we discern what we should do together as the churches and councils in the vast and varied lands of Asia, we commit this Assembly, imploring your guidance and strength to accompany us as we worship and study together and make important decisions affecting the life, work, and witness of the Christian Conference of Asia.

In your Son’s name, Jesus Christ our Lord, we pray. Amen.

## Thematic Presentations

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### ***Keynote Address Thematic Presentation - I***

# **God, Renew Us in Your Spirit and Restore the Creation**

**Rev. Prof. Dr Jerry Pillay**

*General Secretary, World Council of Churches*

Dear sisters and brothers,

It is so good to be with you here today. I would like to express my sincere thanks and appreciation to the General Secretary Dr Mathews George, and the leadership team for the opportunity to present this keynote address, especially on a theme that is so close to the priority and focus of the World Council of Churches (WCC).

### **1. Introduction: The Signs of the Time**

I am sure that you would agree with me in saying that we are living in difficult times. The world is in crisis. Our current global context has been described as a “polycrisis”. Multiple threats—of accelerating climate change, COVID-19 and its impacts, conflicts, ethnic and gender-based violence, war, displacements, hunger and food insecurity, rising inequality and marginalisation add to the complexities and sufferings in the world.

It is obvious today, as Apostle Paul describes 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 as we know it. The world is facing multiple shocks—geopolitical, related to energy, economics, and a climate emergency. Yet, the political establishments are marked by an inability or unwillingness to address these multidimensional and complex challenges.

Rising global temperatures, with global mean temperatures for the past eight years being the highest on record, fuelling environmental degradation, natural disasters, weather extremes, food and water insecurity, economic disruption, conflict, and terrorism. Forest fires are becoming more widespread, burning nearly twice as much tree cover today as they did twenty years ago. Sea levels are rising, the Arctic is melting, coral reefs are dying, and oceans are acidifying. The number of weather-related disasters has increased by a factor of five over fifty years.

Historically speaking, the Global North is responsible for 92 percent of excess emissions. The lack of willingness to share resources and to own up to the damage of excessive consumption by the rich is not only a huge problem between the wealthier and less wealthy nations- it is the reality within each society. The war in Ukraine has displaced 12.8 million people within Ukraine and in other countries, which adds to the more than 100 million people (1 in every 78 people on earth) who are forcibly displaced—the highest number ever recorded since World War II. The global public debt has been rising over the last six decades and has now reached its highest levels. We live in a world where interest rates are raised to bring down rapidly rising inflation, which has little effect on lowering food prices. 828 million people go to bed hungry every night, and 3.1 billion people (nearly 40 percent of the world's population) cannot afford a healthy diet daily. Only a holistic and transformative response to these crises, which will even overwhelm the political and societal impediments, can give us respite from these existential challenges.

## **2. An Ecumenical Response**

As churches and ecumenical movements and regions, we are called to respond to these global challenges, especially the climate crisis. The current ecological crisis is a major challenge for humanity. In recent years, theologians and leaders of various churches and ecumenical organisations have addressed this issue. The WCC assembly in 1961 in New Delhi reinterpreted creation and redemption in a cosmic key, giving rise to the Faith and Order study on “God in nature and history.” Taking this further, the Vancouver assembly in 1983 called churches to make a common commitment to justice, peace, and the integrity of creation. The Canberra assembly of the WCC, in 1991, met under the theme, “Come, Holy Spirit – Renew the Whole Creation”. Subsequently, the WCC has continued its work on justice, peace and integrity of creation in its work on eco-justice.

The 11<sup>th</sup> Assembly of the WCC highlighted the climate emergency as a significant priority for the Council to engage in, and act on. In fact, it considers the climate crisis so urgent that it has called for the establishment of a Commission on Climate Change and Sustainable development.

I am so pleased that creation is included in the theme of this Assembly. It shows that you, too, consider this to be a critical global concern and crisis. Your theme, 'God, Renew Us in Your Spirit, and Restore the Creation' expresses some important points that we must not lose sight of. The theme reflects a prayer to God, the source of our help and strength, asking God to help us overcome our challenges. It categorically states that our trust and hope is in God who is our deliverer and sustainer. The theme is reflected as a prayer to God who lives and reigns in the world in spite of all its evil, corruption, oppression, conflicts, greed, and sin. It is a prayer that God will make the church and Christians to be what God wants and wills for us to be, and that God will use us to change the world so that it may reflect God's reign and presence, bringing justice, peace, love and abundance of life to all.

The words "renew" and "restore" imply that we have lost something, and that we should go back to what we should be, to begin or take up again, to restore to a former state, to replenish, revive or re-establish, to make new. It is the first step to real transformation. In many senses, the church has lost, neglected, forgotten and forsaken its calling. We are called to proclaim the good news of salvation and life in Jesus Christ but we have become side-tracked from our main purpose as church.

The "us" in the theme is a reference to both the church and the world. We recognise that the church is in much need of renewal and transformation just as much as the world with all its injustices, corruption, deceit, and unrighteousness. We thus need to speak to ourselves first before we can tell the world what to do or not to do. In some senses the church is a microcosm of the world rather than being a bridgehead to an alternative world filled with justice, peace and fullness of life for all (John 10:10). The prayer is a plea and cry to God to renew us and to restore creation. Creation is suffering!

While some of us may perceive the climate crisis to be important for us to focus on as Christians, yet many others do not. They also cite biblical reasons for their position. Perhaps the most important argument they make is that protecting nature is not the central task of the church. They

establish that spiritual tasks such as evangelisation are more important than creation care. Proclaiming the salvation of Christ to the world is the mission of the church. They believe that human beings are more important than nature. Helping a starving person or an exploited person seems more important than fair trade coffee. They are more interested in local matters rather than in global issues. Further, they believe that God will take care of God's creation and, therefore, they need not worry about this. God will not allow his creation to be destroyed by humans. God will sustain the world (Gen. 8:22).

Closely related to trust in God is the eschatological view that the present world will pass away and God will create a new world. This view diminishes the focus on creation care and gives rise to the tendency to deny the climate crisis that is already upon us. Sadly, this includes many Christians as well.

Having outlined some of the views that do not give priority to the climate crisis, I shall now attempt three things: i) show from a theological perspective why Christians must take the climate crisis seriously, ii) ask how we can help restore creation, and iii) examine the role of the Church in addressing the same. As we pray to God to renew us in God's spirit and restore creation, we need to know exactly what we are praying for.

### **3. Theological Perspectives**

We can link many theological themes to climate change and why Christians should take this seriously. I will address three aspects in this section.

#### **3.1. God and Creation**

The very first chapter of Genesis is clear that God is the creator of the world. The universe was freely created from nothing out of the benevolence of God and that "God saw everything that he had made, and, indeed, it was very good" (Gen. 1:31). Psalm 8 establishes that God set the "moon and stars in place" and gave the human person care and consideration. Psalm 24:1 tell us quite emphatically that "the earth is the Lord's and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it, for he founded it upon the seas and established it upon the waters."

These verses not only tell us that, as Creator, this is God's world but it also speaks about the character of the Creator. Creation is an expression of God's divine grace and faithful loving-kindness. Creation is not controlled by the power of a blind fate, but by the word of God. Hence, it discloses

at the same time the grace of God that is made manifest in the gift of freedom and creativity given to the human person.

Creation is also an expression of God's goodness in that it is "good" - in fact, "very good", according to Genesis I (NRSV). It is good, apart from human values (Ps. 104) and independent of human interests. It is good not in the sense that evil is absent, which is clearly is not the case, but in the sense that the creation is an expression of the goodness of the Creator, that it is intensely valued by God in all its moral ambiguity, that it functions in accord with the divine design, that it is an appropriate habitat for humanity and all other beings in our interdependent relationships, and that it serves God's redemptive purposes for all created beings. Thus, God values biophysical reality and the needs of every form of life, human and otherwise. The planet has been created as a habitat to be shared by all. God's compassionate concern covers the whole and this concern is extended to human beings.

Genesis 3 establishes that the fall of man affected not only the relationship between God and human beings but all of creation as well. This affirmation of the biophysical is prominent also in the doctrines of the incarnation and the presence of the Spirit as in the incarnation "the Word became flesh and lived among us" (John I: 14, NRSV). In the life, ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth, we have encountered the saving Christ. The incarnation confers dignity not only on humanity but on everything with which humanity is united in the biophysical interdependence. The incarnation opens the eye of faith to a new vision of the whole.

Moreover, in the church's experience of the Spirit, the world is filled with the glory of God (Isa.6:3; Ps. 19:1; Eph. 4:6). God is not only beyond but in the creation as the vivifying, reconciling, liberating, and sanctifying presence of the Spirit. Indeed, God is intimate with the creation, experiencing the joys and agonies of all creatures (Rom. 8:19-25). The whole creation is thereby endowed with value and dignity by association with the sacred. It is to be valued as God, who chose to be present within it, and values it.

Thus, on the basis of our Christian interpretations of creation, incarnation, and the Spirit, biophysical realities have great moral significance. They are worthy of appropriate care and concern. Material needs are not to be denied or transcended. Contempt for the material or biophysical is a false spirituality. There must be no indifference to hunger, poverty, and disease; human physical well-being matters! Nor should there be any



neglect of ecological integrity. While humans need to use other forms of life as resources, we also have responsibilities to use these resources fairly and frugally, to minimise harm to other living things, and to ensure sufficiency for all human communities, present and future. Therefore, wanton pollution, profligate consumption, human-induced extinctions, and excessive differences in economic well-being are sins—all because the God who is Creator, Redeemer, and Spirit, lovingly affiliates all of creation. As God loves and cares for all creation, so must we express and exercise creation care.

### **3.2. Creation and Human Responsibility**

The moral status of human beings is enhanced by the claim of the Christian church, based on Genesis 1:26–28 that humans are created in the image of God. According to Calvin, in this regard, the human person becomes the mirror of God’s goodness. Humankind is called upon to reflect God’s love, care and concern for the earth and other life forms. Calvin points out that “God having fashioned the universe as a magnificent theatre of His glory, God placed man (sic) in it last of all as the privileged spectator.” Even in himself, adorned by God with exceptional gifts, man was the most excellent example of God’s works. And he was endowed besides with the capacity to turn his eyes outward and to admire the handiwork of God in others of His creatures.

To be created in the image of God provides a great honour—and a great responsibility. However, ideals of stewardship and dominion have often led to practices of dominion and devastation. Human beings have often regarded themselves as masters of the world, taming and domesticating it, doing as they please with its resources. This has characterised an anthropocentric outlook, which has been challenged by many theologians. Andrew Wannback thus points out that “we need to emphasise our *responsibilities* more than our *rights*, and accept also the limits of our authority” (*italics added*).

The image of God also entails social and ecological responsibilities—and here dangerous distortions of the concept have arisen in modern cultures. The image is linked in Genesis 1:26–28 with dominion, which the divine images are called to exercise in relation to all other life-forms. This idea has raised the important question of whether dominion is a license for the destruction of nature or a mandate for its benevolent care and use. While dominion has been interpreted as a divine grant to prey on the rest of nature without restraints, we regard dominion to mean the entire stewardship of nature.



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(Sikhism)



Dr S.S. Bhattaraka Charukeerthi  
Pandithacharyavarya Mahaswamiji  
(Jainism)



Panelists of the session "Interfaith Perspectives  
on Renewal and Restoration of Creation"



## ***Churcho* – Deliberative Sessions**



Churcha on Resilience of Ecosystems for the Sustainability of Creation: Towards Life-Giving Agriculture in Asia



Churcha on Challenges of the Digital World and Pitfalls of Technological Advancement



Participants of Churcha on Restoring Balance for Gender Justice and Environmental Healing



Prof. Dr M. A. Oommen presenting the theme at Churcha session on Holistic Approach to Economy, Ecology, and Oikoumene in Asian Context



Churcha on Theology of Fullness of Life and Restoration of Creation



Churcha on Eco-Spirituality and Liturgical Innovations:  
An Asian Theological Appraisal



Churcha on Climate Crisis Mitigation and Adaptation;  
Environmental Sustainability in God's Oikos



Fr Dr K. M. George presenting the theme at Churcha session  
on Responsible Stewardship and Participation  
in God's Mission of Renewal and Restoration of Creation



Churcha on Understanding Ekklesia and Diakonia:  
Supremacy and Self-referentiality, or Creative Collaboration?



## Discussions on Assembly Statements



Basanti Biswas,  
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Rev. John Gilmore,  
NCC Australia



Joy Han,  
Uniting Church in Australia



Meenu Rabecca Mathai,  
Malankara Jacobite Syrian Orthodox Church



Rev. Dr. Liberato C. Bautista,  
United Methodist Church



Agnes Souisa,  
Protestant Church in Maluku





Mervin H. Toquero,  
National Council of Churches in the Philippines



Rev. Ebenezer Joseph,  
Methodist Church of Sri Lanka



Bishop Steven Lawrence,  
Evangelical Lutheran Church in Malaysia



Rev. Allan Kickett,  
Uniting Church in Australia



Ma. Kay Cathrine Almario,  
National Council of Churches in the Philippines



Vaughn Geuseppe Alviar,  
Iglesia Filipina Independiente



Delegates at the Assembly statements sessions



Assembly delegates adopting the Assembly Statements

Osborn points out that we must be careful as to how we choose to understand the word ‘command’ in Genesis 1. He warns that we must not allow this to mislead us into thinking that God’s creative activity is narrowly deterministic. On the contrary, in uttering those commands, God gives permission for creation to be. The appearance of creation is a glad act of embrace. More positively, the creative words may be regarded as holding out a promise to creation, as offering created beings the gift of a future with God.

Thus, humans are the stewards of everything God has conferred on us by which we are able to help our neighbour, and are required to render account of our stewardship. Moreover, the only right stewardship is that which is tested by the rule of love”(3.7.5). The partially reconstituted human life of person—in Calvin’s theology—must be a life in loving community.

In describing such a community, Sallie McFague points out: “We can no longer see ourselves as rulers over nature but must think of ourselves as gardeners, caretakers, mothers and fathers, stewards, trustees, lovers, priests, co-creators and friends of a world that while giving us life and sustenance also depends increasingly on us in order to continue both for itself and for us.”

Harvey Sindima argues that “community must be based in a consciousness that all creatures are part of all others, that humans share a common destiny with nature.” Gabriel Setiloane, who refers to community, also echoes this: “inclusive of all life (bios): animals, the habitat (the land), and flora, even the elements.” The earth should be viewed as one. This implies mutuality and interdependence. What is done to one part of creation affects the rest.

In contrast, humans act in the image of God when they are responsible representatives. We are to “subdue” the earth only to the extent necessary to protect important human interests like nutrition, health, and creativity, and to do so in accord with the values of God’s dominion. To be in the image of God is a vocation or calling, based on the biological fact that humans alone have evolved the peculiar capacity to represent, in modest caring ways, God’s care for creation. We are called to be protectors of the biosphere and the frugal consumers of the world’s goods for the sake of just distribution among all humanity and other life-forms.

The New Testament’s understanding of the image of God enhances this social and ecological responsibility. Christ is the perfection of the image

and the paradigm of dominion (2 Cor. 4:4; Col. 1:15; Heb. 1:3; John 1:14–18). Christians are to mirror the reconciling love of Christ (Eph. 5:1–2). Humanity is to reflect that love in relationships with all that God loves. This means to live out the image and the responsibility with nurturing and serving love. We are called to be faithful stewards, but only so long as stewardship is understood as just and benevolent service on behalf of the interests of both human and non-human kind.

But creation also carries a challenge, calling upon human persons to complete it and make it serve the higher aims of the human spirit. The things of nature are, in themselves, not complete, but await the human person's work to give them their full significance in the pattern of the universe in submission to the plan of God.

The first statement of the Apostle's Creed is that God is the Maker of heaven and earth. This is an affirmation of divine sovereignty, universal providence, creaturely dependence—and human responsibility. Nothing in creation is independent of God; nothing is equated with God. We learn from scripture “that God by the power of His Word and Spirit created heaven and earth out of nothing” (Gen. 1). The statement that he brought the world into being out of nothing proclaims him to be the one who alone is eternal and self-existent. In relation to him, everything else stands on another plane. However, in the person of Jesus Christ is the final point of contact between God and the world. In the hypostatic union, Creator and creature become one and indivisible without any loss of their distinctive natures, without any confusion. There is an absolute difference but no distance between Creator and created.

In this regard, Moltmann sees God in creation rather than over creation. For him, God in creation is strongly pneumatological, for creation:

...exists in the Spirit, is modelled by the Son and is created by the Father. It is...from God, through God, and in God... [Such a] trinitarian concept of creation binds together God's transcendence and his immanence.

Moltmann sees God as immanent in his creation. This means that his Spirit is the very spirit of the universe, sustaining the initial creation out of his creative energy. Creation is thus not simply a single event occurring in the past but a continuing event right up to the advent of the eschaton. It is both a *creatio ex nihilo* and a *creatio continua*. Human beings are invited to share in this responsibility of bringing the world to its ultimate destiny as God intends it.



As the creator of all things, we must note that God created not only the visible but also the invisible. God is the sole source and providential benefactor of all beings. God alone is the ultimate and universal proprietor: "The earth is the Lord's and all that is in it, the world, and all those who live in it" (Psalm 24:1, NRSV; cf. Ps. 50:12; 146:57). For Calvin, this implies that everything in the last resort must serve God. Hence, those who put their faith and trust in God have a more special responsibility to care for the earth and to be involved in the world. Why? Because this is God's world! And the way we choose to praise God is to take care of his world.

This then, understood correctly, has strong environmental implications. It means that we cannot continue to abuse the earth. We need a new awareness of the social responsibility of property and of the generational accountability of whatever we do. The good life is no good life if it has disastrous consequences for nature, for myself and for the generations to come. David Field reminds us of the need for human responsibility:

"... this good creation belongs to God whose glory it displays. It can never be the private possession of finite human beings. The goodness of creation places the ethical demand on humanity to respect and even reverence creation."

This creation is suffering. There are thousands and thousands of examples: ozone depletion, climate change, land degradation, water pollution, deforestation, habitual destruction, species extinction, use and misuse of biotechnology. Every day seems to bring news of some new environmental deterioration.

In light of all this, we cannot simply relax and say, "There is always hope; God will save life". No, we have to live with the dialectic of the real threat and the real hope, with the knowledge that God wanted us to be co-creators. Liz Carmichael makes this point more strongly:

Our own activity meets God's activity in both individual and social spheres. Just as in our individual spiritual life our own efforts to become new people meet the transforming power of God's grace, so in our efforts to create new societies we discover that we are co-workers with God in realising God's vision for the world

Hence, the church has the responsibility to call on all people to assume the responsibility to care for the earth. Christ-care for the world must be linked with creation- care of Christ-followers. To make the world a better place for all people and creation.

### **3.3 The Kingdom of God and Creation**

The ecumenical movement has considered the Kingdom of God as an essential biblical theme to support its work in the transformation of the world. From its focus on unity, theology, justice, preferential option of the poor, integrity of creation and peace, the WCC has placed intentional, that is, direct involvement, in society; it actually moves beyond the walls of the church and engages in missionary work such as evangelism and work for justice and peace. The understanding of the church as sacrament, sign, and instrument has led to a new perception of the relationship between the church and the world. Mission is viewed as “God’s turning to the world”, this represents a fundamentally new approach to theology and a broader vision of theological praxis.

The Kingdom of God is related to creation in that God’s rule and reign is over the whole world. The goal of the kingdom is life in its fullness which includes social, political and economic aspects of life. Biblically, we discover four important points about the kingdom of God.

### **3.4. The “Kingdom” is Not Merely Spiritual**

Christians who view the “kingdom” in exclusively spiritual terms, avoiding dedicated service to the transformation of society, usually do so on two traditions. The first is the apocalyptic notion of a divine future that relegates the Lordship of Christ to an imagined end of times. The other is the Hellenistic notion that the Lordship of Christ is applicable only to the spiritual, not to the physical and social realms. The statement attributed to Jesus, “My kingdom is not of this world!” (John 18:36) has been misquoted endless times to legitimate this dual evasion. The “kingdom of God” will come when God wills it to come, it is said, and humans can do nothing about the evil world as long as it lasts. The only valid response to the depravity of the world is to accept Jesus as one’s personal Saviour, gain peace with God, and love each other. The peace of the rest of creation is not part of the Christian agenda. Nurnberger states that “this kind of piety is nothing but an (probably unconscious) attempt to rationalise oneself out of responsibility.” Castro adds that nowhere does the New Testament spiritualise the “kingdom of God” or limit it to the spiritual side of nature. Verkuyl points out that the “Kingdom” to which the Bible testifies involves a proclamation and a realisation of a total salvation, one which covers the whole range of human needs and destroys every pocket of evil and grief affecting humankind. He adds that “kingdom” in the New Testament has a breadth and scope which is unsurpassed; it embraces heaven as well as earth, world history as well as the whole cosmos.



It is true that humans cannot create the ideal conditions envisioned by the concept of the “kingdom of God” but that does not mean that they should not have a vision that provides direction and inspiration for a world according to God’s plan.

Consequently, many today view the “kingdom of God” in socio-economic and political terms. For example, Sobrino points out that Liberation Theology, as far as it is concerned with liberation, adopts and makes use of the “Kingdom of God” as “its most all-embracing theological concept”. The work of Jesus is seen in a similar way, as Mofokeng puts it: “The key concept in the praxis of Jesus is the impending advent of the ‘kingdom of God’ with its universality and totality of scope.” In our view the “Kingdom of God” does not signify something that is purely spiritual or outside this world. It is the totality of this material world, spiritual and human that is now introduced into God’s order.

Even Jesus did not have an exclusively spiritual view of the “kingdom”. Such can be seen in some of the ancient texts: “I tell you solemnly, I shall not drink any more wine until the day I drink the new wine in the ‘kingdom of God’” (Mark 14:25). At other times he promises to whoever abandons all for love of the “kingdom” a hundredfold in houses and lands (Mark 10:30). To the disciples he says: “And now I confer a ‘kingdom’ on you; you will eat and drink at my table in my ‘kingdom’ and you will sit on thrones to judge the twelve tribes of Israel” (Luke 22:29–30; cf. Matt. 19:28). The breakthrough of this new order is imminent: “I tell you solemnly, before this generation has passed away all these things will have taken place” (Mark 13:30). On one occasion he makes it still more concrete and affirms: “I tell you solemnly, there is some standing here who will not taste death before they see the ‘kingdom of God’ come with power” (Mark 9:1). Christ is aware of the fact that the end of the world has begun with him. He himself already belongs to the “kingdom”. The idea of the kingdom of God not being merely spiritual validates Christian involvement in transforming the world, as understood by ecumenical movements.

### **3.5. The “Kingdom of God” is Not a Territory but a New Order**

In one of the most visionary passages of the entire Bible, Paul speaks of Jesus Christ “handing over the kingdom to the Father, after he has destroyed every ruler and authority and power” (1 Cor. 15:24). In this text the “kingdom” is understood as life free from the reign of all those forces which enslave humanity. These “powers” are understood as

enemies, which act against human life here and now— the final enemy being death (1 Cor. 15:26). Elsewhere, Paul defines the power as all those aspects of life which enslave: sin (Rom. 7:14), the law (Rom. 7:10), vanity and corruption (Rom. 8:19–21), this present evil age (Gal. 1:4), weak and miserable principles (Gal. 4:9), spiritual forces of evil (Eph. 6:12). By contrast, the “Kingdom” is life where human beings are no longer subjected to destructive forces.

In another sense, the “kingdom” is the sphere of life where God’s Spirit is in control, where justice, peace, and joy are experienced completely and permanently (Rom. 14:17). It is the messianic banquet, where everyone will enjoy, equally and to the full, God’s noble gifts, experiencing how another’s enjoyment of being human enhances one’s own. It is the place where God will be ‘all in all’ (1 Cor. 15:28): that is, recognised universally as the source of all life, justice, love, wisdom and truth, the only redeemer, the Lord of history and the righteous and merciful.

The “kingdom of God” then is not a territory but a new order. It cannot be narrowed down to any particular aspect. It embraces all: the world, the human person, and society, creation; the totality of reality is to be transformed by God. Hence the phrase of Jesus: “The kingdom of God is among you.” (Luke 17:21). Boff states that the latter expression, according to most recent exegesis, signifies: “The new order introduced by God is at your disposition. Do not ask when it may be established in the future. Don’t run here and there as if the “kingdom of God’ were attached to some place.” Verkuyl states that:

The Kingdom of God is that new order of affairs begun in Christ which, when finally completed by him, will involve a proper restoration not only of man’s (sic) relationship to God but also of those between exes, generations, races, and even between man (sic) and nature.

To view the “Kingdom of God” as a new order characterised by justice, peace and righteousness has two serious implications. Firstly, it implies a revolution in our thinking and acting. It calls for a conversion that does not only consist of pious exercises, but rather in a new mode of existing before God and in the light of the tidings announced by Jesus. It is to choose to be where God is and to do what God does, i.e., among the poor and oppressed in society (see Matt. 13:4–46, 10:37; Luke 17:33; Mark 9:43). This is precisely what the ecumenical movement has shown us with the preferential-option-for-the-“poor” approach. It is a willingness

to say no to the established order, which impoverishes and dehumanises human beings in the interest of self and self-acquisitiveness.

Secondly, the “kingdom of God” implies a revolution of the human world. It calls for a radical change to the human condition of poverty and exploitation. It requires that Christians participate in God’s plan to bring about a transformation of the world and well-being of all human beings and creation. This involves opposing oppressive structures in the attempt to bring about justice and shalom. Thus, action towards the realisation of the “kingdom of God” can now be seen as legitimate human response to the divine initiative. However, it must be stated that the coming of the “Kingdom of God” is the sole initiative of God. Nevertheless, God can, and does, involve people in the service of his “Kingdom”. It thus places an imperative on the church to be involved in the struggles of people in the world today.

### **3.6. The “Kingdom of God” is Here**

The “kingdom” is a present reality. Jesus sends the disciples, and tells them: “All authority, all power, the reign in heaven and on earth has been given to me” (Mt. 28:18–20). Consequently, the disciples go into all regions of the world knowing a priori that those regions are already being shaped by the “kingdom” that has been given to Christ, and that is surely coming.

According to the Bible the “kingdom” does not belong exclusively to the future. It is a present reality that, though not yet fully revealed, does nevertheless show definite signs of being underway (Matt. 2: 4–6, Luke 10:18, 17:20–21).

The “kingdom” is present in the struggles of humanity. But in so far as humanity suffers still with Christ, and Christ still suffers with us, its resurrection and transformation remain a future hope and the “kingdom” is still to come. It is as Philpott puts it quoting the Amawoti community: “The kin-dom of God will be perfect at the end of the age. Right now, it is struggling because of sin, the church, and the government. It’s not perfect, but it is here.” In the meantime, human beings are called to participate in the coming of God’s “kingdom”, which is not just a vision for the future but a profound critique of our best efforts in the here and now.

Bonhoeffer points out that as Christians our responsibilities are in the world and to the world, not the beyond. By this, he meant that one must be “this-worldly”, by which he means “living unreservedly in life’s duties,

problems, successes and failure, experiences and perplexities. He adds, “to be this-worldly is to throw ourselves completely into the arms of God, taking seriously, not our own sufferings, but those of God in the world—watching with Christ in Gethsemane.” Thus, the kingdom is to be founded here, amidst sin and suffering, and not left to the life to come.

### **3.7. The “Kingdom” to Come**

While the kingdom is here and present in the world yet it is still to come. The prayer of Jesus in the Lord’s prayer maintains the dialectic between the “kingdom” we pray for and the will of God that is to be implemented on earth. God’s “kingdom” is future, it will come, we are called to enter it; but the “kingdom” is also at work. Barth points this out as he relates the present and active work of the living Lord to his ascension. Jesus is present and active in the existence and by the activity of the community that is created, moved and enlightened by his Holy Spirit. And because of his presence and activity in and through the community in the world, the alteration that has objectively happened in the world is visible and tangible in it but only in the light of the story of Jesus Christ and not independently, that is, in the light of the altered community and altered world.

Jesus who is present and active in the community of his followers is also the One who is coming in his new being, his new Easter form, as the Crucified and Risen. This promise has an unmistakable effect on the community’s consciousness, activities and forms of life or structures. The community understands itself as an eschatological community whose being is ahead of it in the coming being of Christ who is coming. Its activities and its structures of societal life, which it has helped to realise, are provisional and transient in view of the coming Lord of the world. The present, its activities and achievements of the transformation of the world, are not denied nor ignored as to their importance for the world here and now. Neither are they overvalued. The present project, and achievements of the committed community do have and do retain an undeniable importance for the overall movement and global project of the community towards the definitive. It is not only a necessary basis for the movement and its activities for the creation of new structures of life and new ways of living. But it is mainly a basis of an impatient movement to the future. In other words, hope of the coming of Jesus Christ, of the definitive manifestation of alteration of the world creates impatience and mobility. This is evident in the phrases employed by Barth to describe the

effect of the promise of the coming of Jesus Christ: they “reach forward” and “they stretch out to” the new.

The coming Jesus Christ deepens and enriches present Christian praxis immeasurably, creates and sustains an unshakeable confidence in the future liberation, and makes radical engagement for liberation, by itself almost always a painful burden, a joyful event. He is therefore the object of faith and the content of hope. But faith is not a kind of make-believe utopianism. Faith is protest against apparent inevitabilities and the restoration of creation. With this, I turn to the next section to ask, what can we do to help restore creation.

## **4. Restoring Creation**

The prayer offered in this Assembly theme is that God will restore God’s creation. From what we have been saying thus far, it is apparent that humans have a role to play in the restoration of creation. God does not only work in us but also through us to create a better world for all. The question I shall now explore is: How can we work with God in restoring creation? We help restore creation when we:

### **4.1. Work for Justice in the World**

Justice is a very significant theological aspect of responding to the urgent environmental crisis. At first glance, environmental issues may not seem to be divisive for churches, however, when we look at the churches in their national and geographical contexts, complexities and divisions emerge. Ecological efforts often confront national, economic, and political interests. National and regional government decisions about climate are often shaped by the economic development interest of each nation or region. Thus, many WCC studies linking poverty, wealth, and ecology have concluded: “The merciless mutilation of the Earth in search of profits is such that the productive and regenerative limits of the planet have now been overstepped.” Cultivation and Care makes the point that justice in and for creation cannot be addressed separately from attention to the entanglement of ecology, economy, and cultural identity.

The rights and responsibilities associated with the image of God are inextricably tied to the stress on justice in Scripture and tradition. Love is seeking the well-being of others in response to their needs and to the God who is love, and justice is an indispensable dimension of love and full respect for their rights. We render to others their due because of our

loving respect for their God-given dignity and value. Hence distributive justice must be a critical focus of our global social and ecological responsibilities.

An investigation into the meaning of justice (*tsedeq* and *tsedaqah*) in the Old Testament shows that in the context of creation, it has wider meaning. Justice for Israel, like all its neighbours in the Ancient Near East, manifests itself in the right and harmonious order of creation. In order to understand the peculiar nature of ancient Near Eastern conceptions of justice it is important to realise that creation does not primarily refer to the origin of the world at the beginning, but to a process by which cosmos, order, replaces chaos, not only in nature, but in society as well.

The God portrayed in Scripture is the “lover of justice”: “The King is mighty, he loves justice—you have established equity; in Jacob you have done what is just and right” (Ps. 99:4; cf. Ps.33:5; 37:28; 2:7; Isa. 30:18; 61:8; Jer. 9:24). We see in his dealings with Israel how God seeks justice for his people. In sympathetic response to the groaning of Hebrew slaves (Ex. 2:23–24), the God “who executes justice for the oppressed” and “gives food to the hungry” (Ps. 146:7, NRSV) pushed Moses to become the liberator, smashed the shackles of Pharaoh, and led the people to a new homeland. God’s deliverance became the paradigm of justice for Israel and continues to be so for us.

Faithfulness to covenant relationships demands a justice that recognises special obligations, “a preferential option” to widows, orphans, the poor, and aliens—in other words, the economically vulnerable and politically oppressed (Ex. 23: 6–9; Deut. 15:2–11; 24:14–22; Jer. 22:16; Amos 2:6–7; 5: 10–12). This tradition of concern for the weak and poor was embodied in the idea of the Jubilee Year (Lev. 25). The Jubilee Year prevented unjust concentrations of power and poverty by requiring the return of property every fifty years. Similarly, the Year of Release (Deut. 15:1–18) provided amnesty for debtors and liberation of indentured servants every seven years. Justice then is at the ethical core of the biblical message. Hence it is a moral imperative for Christians, especially in our time. Human beings, as moral agents and agents of social change, possess the power to make positive moral choices and engage in liberative actions aimed at the transformation of society in accordance with the moral norm of justice. Justice demands that we focus especially on meeting the needs of the poor and oppressed both domestically and globally. Justice must also be extended to non-human life. Thus, economic policies and systems must

also be evaluated socially and ecologically on the basis of their benefits and harms to the well-being of all in our interdependent relationships. Economic policies that allow the rich to get richer and the poor to get poorer must not be tolerated. Economic policies that enable some to get more benefits and others to be deprived must be confronted and resisted with all perseverance. The struggle for social justice is the transformation of existing structures of state, economic order and society, so that the poor and oppressed may become full participants in the total life of society. Humankind must thus be actively, and radically involved in the creation of a just society. In harmony with divine purpose, the human being (especially the Christian) must be radically involved in the struggle for justice, and willing to suffer courageously for the redemption of the human community.

#### **4.2. We Build Communities on Love**

The church's ministry is to be a manifestation of the love of Christ. Hence, all of God's people are called to be agents of this love. We do this as we witness on behalf of social and ecological justice and call out for repentance and reconciliation. We do this as we become the voice for (and with) the poor, a challenge to the rich. God accompanies the poor on the journey to justice and calls the church to accompany the poor—working and sharing with them, learning from them, and testifying with them to the presence and power of God (Isa. 40:27–29), attempting to be the loving and caring presence of Christ.

#### **4.3. We Hold Out Hope to a Broken and Suffering World**

The Apostle Paul described the whole creation as waiting in longing and hope for fulfilment (Rom. 8:22). It is interesting that Paul links the groaning creation with hope. The task of the church is to hold out hope in the midst of suffering, darkness and despair. The climate crisis is with us and it will get worse if we do nothing about it. It is also noteworthy that Paul links groaning creation to hope and to the Holy Spirit. The Spirit helps us in our weakness, prays for us and points us to God's future glory in spite of the suffering creation.

This, of course, is not a sign of resignation, of leaving it all to God. On the contrary, hope in God ought to give birth to action, for change and transformation; it must lead to the healing of creation. Hope calls us to have a vision of the new heaven and earth and to work with God in bringing this about. The climate crisis calls us to live out in hope and



expectation that God will heal and restore the groaning creation. Hope is living and working with the confidence and trust in God who will make all things new. The world's challenges are numerous, and the message of impending peril is loud and clear. But is the message of hope and encouragement equally clear? As followers of Jesus Christ, we realise our hope and trust is in the Triune God, who continues to inspire and call us to be agents of hope. The restoration of creation happens only with a renewed Spirit, leading to a metanoia (transformation) in the hearts, minds and actions of people and communities. That will assist us to reconcile and live in harmony with each other and our environments.

In preparing for receiving and realising our prayer—"God, renew us in your spirit and restore the creation"—we must transform our vision of the future. Past experiences influence our present existence. It is also evident that our present thoughts and actions influence our future. But can the future impact the present? According to our faith, it is possible. Our vision of the future decides what we do now and how we dedicate our lives. The inspired and envisioned existence will influence the trajectory of our lives into the future. If we have a vision for the future and hold on to that vision, and if, as a community and as a movement, humanity works towards it, with the help of God, that vision can become a reality. What are we praying for? What is our vision for the future? When our Lord Jesus taught us to pray as part of the Lord's prayer, "Thy kingdom come", he asked us to invoke the reign of God, here on earth.

#### **4.4. Work for Peace and Reconciliation**

Earlier I outlined the signs of our times. I pointed out the polycrisis that is prevalent in the world today. Hunger, poverty, economic discrepancies, inequalities, ethnic, political, religious and gender violence, to name a few. Countries all over the world are riddled with conflicts, factions and tensions. We are living in the context of war.

In the Asian context, there are the challenges of migration, human trafficking, religious fundamentalism, struggles of minority faith communities and the quest and protection of religious freedom, among the other things mentioned of global concern. There is a struggle for peace and justice that affects the stable order of societies and threatens creation at large. The WCC addresses these in so many parts of the world and certainly in every continent. It is about the building up of a just human community. The Hebrew word *shalom* sums up for us a vision of God's purpose for creation. Shalom is a vision of the flourishing of a

peaceful, equitable and just human community living in fellowship with God and in harmonious relationship with a thriving non-human creation. Human well-being is to be measured by the extent to which the human community experiences shalom, wholeness and harmony. The task of the church is to work for the healing, reconciliation and unity of the world and of all creation.

The way we live and relate with others is deeply influenced by our sense of identity and how we perceive others. Who am I? Who is the other?

According to the Holy Scriptures, all human beings are image-bearers of God (Genesis 1:27). We are obliged to protect and care for each other. We are also to see ourselves as part of the 'One body of Christ' and nourished by one source, the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:12–27). Despite our race, gender, caste, ethnicity, ideology, ability or status, we are part of one community and one body. Whatever we are, whoever we are, we belong to the one God who created us in his own image. We are the ones that foster superiority of race, class and distinctions when the God of love and justice desires us to be one.

## **5. Concluding Remarks**

In this address, I have tried to reflect on our current times, especially on the global climate crisis, offered theological insight into Christian involvement in caring for creation and focused on the role of churches in restoring creation. Perhaps, the opening sentence of the statement—*"The Living Planet: Seeking a Just and Sustainable Global Community"* adopted at the 11<sup>th</sup> Assembly of the WCC in Karlsruhe summarises it well for us:

Together we believe... The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it. Human beings, created in God's own image, are called to serve as faithful and responsible caretakers of God's precious unique creation, of which we are at the same time an inherent part and inextricably dependent on the health of the whole natural world. A narrow anthropocentric understanding of our relationship with Creation must be revised to a whole of life understanding, to achieve a sustainable global ecosystem. We are all interdependent in God's whole creation. As Christ's love moves the world to reconciliation and unity, we are called to metanoia and a renewed and just relationship with Creation that expresses itself in our practical life.

As General Secretary of the WCC, daily I observe how far we are from what God desires and wills for the world. God wants justice, reconciliation, unity and peace. What we desire is disunity, discord, hatred, war, and divisions. It is not surprising that the world is in a mess. That is why we have to constantly pray, God, renew your Spirit in us and restore your creation. It is an acknowledgement that we cannot do it by ourselves, and that we need God's Holy Spirit to help us. God's spirit can do the impossible. Let us keep praying, walking and working to restore God's creation with God leading us. As we pray, God renew your Spirit in us and restore Creation. Let us pray by saying, "Lord, start with me, and work in me and through me to restore your creation,"

May God bless the Christian Conference of Asia! May God bless you all!  
Thank you.

## **Thematic Presentation - II**

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### ***Sub-Theme I:*** **Renewal and Restoration of Creation:** **Affirming the Will of God**

**Dr Judy Berinai**

*Sabah Theological Seminary, Malaysia*

Greetings to all of you, brothers and sisters, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ!

I wish to express my heartiest congratulations to the honourable leaders of CCA, officers, staff, members of the organising committee, stewards, and everyone who is involved as delegates. Participants, ecumenical partners, resource persons, and guests in this 15<sup>th</sup> CCA General Assembly of CCA. What a wonderful and significant event! The opening service held yesterday was spectacular and it truly reflected our unity in diversity in Christ. As Psalm 133:1 says, “How good and pleasant it is when God’s people live together in unity.”

Massive congratulations to the worship team for inspiring us to worship God together in unity irrespective of our diverse church traditions. During this assembly, we glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ with one heart and mouth during morning and evening prayer as well as in all the sessions! To God be the glory!

I am delighted to be here with all of you and I am honoured to share my brief presentation or reflections with you all this morning based on the sub-theme “Renewal and Restoration of God’s Creation: Affirming God’s Will” (Romans 15:5–6 and Psalm 143:10).

Romans 15:5–6: “May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you a spirit of unity among yourselves as you follow Christ Jesus, so that with one heart and mouth you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

#### **A Call for Unity of the Local Churches and Global Body of Christ**

Romans 15:5–6 is an exhortation or a call to Christians to bond in unity (not necessarily organisational unity or conformity to false teaching).

The spirit of unity is primarily expressed in our commitment to each other as we overcome our differences in theology, doctrines, worldviews, and ethnic or racial diversity.

The spirit of unity does not refer to superficial formalism, nor conformity to doctrinal standards, but rather having the same view of the Christian life: to live to love and please God, and to love and serve each other without selfish interests.

In John 17:20–23 the “unity” for which Jesus prayed was not just an invisible, spiritual unity, but also a unity that the world can see as witnesses of Christ in our respective contexts.

Our unity in Christ is the most significant factor that enables us to pray and act in one accord as we are renewed by the Spirit and to restore God’s creation. We need to affirm our unity in Christ which I believe is the will of God for the local churches and global Body of Christ represented in this 15<sup>th</sup> CCA General Assembly.

### **A Call for Unity of the Local Churches and Global Body of Christ in Renewal and Restoration of God’s Creation**

What does it mean to say that God is the Creator, or that the cosmos is created?

Is the divine creativity that produces the world similar to human creativity?

How should we as Christians understand the existence of evil in God’s creation?

These questions which belong to the doctrine of creation have direct consequences for how Christians understand the nature of God and salvation as well as the theological significance of ecology and environmental sustainability. This was expounded comprehensively and profoundly by the inaugural speaker, Prof. Dr Jerry Pillay, yesterday.

It is obvious that the ecological emergence which threatens all life on earth today is as much a spiritual crisis, as it is a practical challenge for the local churches and global Body of Christ.

To be renewed and to restore God’s creation, we as the local churches and global Body of Christ are called to revisit and re-examine our Christian doctrine of creation. We are to recover or to discover an ecological view of God’s creation and humanity’s place within it.

## **A Call for Unity of the Local Churches and Global Body of Christ in Renewal and Restoration: Affirming God's Will**

The story of creation in Genesis emphasises the orderliness, beauty, and fullness of God's creation. God said, "It is good" (Creation story in Genesis). Everything that God created was good until sin was committed by humanity.

Furthermore, the Bible teaches us that God created the world from nothing (ex nihilo). This is an affirmation to us that creation is an act of grace.

In view of that, creation is a gift and humanity is part of the gift rather than the recipient. As part of the gift, we as God's created beings, created in God's image, are to participate in God's power and creativity in caring for the environment and in God's sustaining of all things.

We as the local churches and global Body of Christ are called to be renewed both individually and corporately and in unity to restore God's creation by participating in Christian environmental action or implementing green doctrine. It is our response to God's act of grace that is pleasing to God and that is affirming God's will.

### **Churches and the Global Body of Christ to do God's Will by the Leading of the Spirit**

Let us echo what the Psalmist says in Psalm 143:10: "Teach me to do your will, for You are my God; my God; may Your Spirit lead us."

To conclude, I would like to exhort each and every one of us, representatives of the local churches and global body of Christ across Asia, Europe, Canada, Australia and all over the world to continue to seek God's wisdom and say this prayer so that God renews us in the Spirit and empowers us to restore God's creation.

## **Thematic Presentation - III**

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### ***Sub-Theme I:***

## **Renewal and Restoration of Creation: Affirming the Will of God An Indigenous Filipino Perspective**

**Rev. Dr Ferdinand Anno**

*Union Christian College, The Philippines*

The global COVID-19 pandemic sent us a resounding message: our stewardship of life has fallen short, revealing our disconnection from the earth and all its inhabitants. It underscores the vast chasm we've created between ourselves and our neighbours. These separations from our fellow human beings, the Earth, our own selves, and divinity are transgressions or sins that we need to repent from as we strive to help in the renewal and restoration of creation.

### **An Idolatrous Situation**

Firstly, humanity has positioned itself as the focal point, believing that everything and everyone, including God, revolves around us. This self-centeredness includes our attempt to recreate God in our image—an act that exemplifies our radical and excessive anthropocentrism.

Our human-centric worldview extends beyond mere centrality; it also establishes a hierarchical relationship wherein humans reign supreme in the ecological order. This skewed perspective has its roots in a distorted interpretation of Judaeo-Christian cosmology that is characterized by perverted, monarchic, androcentric, and misogynistic elements. This anthropocentric mindset has led to severe ecological injustices. Over the past century and beyond—a period geologists refer to as the Anthropocene—the earth has suffered due to our unbridled exploitation. During this time, we have witnessed the decline of “biocracy” and the rise of a hierarchical structure that places humans at the pinnacle of an ecological pyramid [often under the guise of ‘stewardship’ and “trusteeship”!].

Secondly, our radical monotheism has taken a regrettable turn, becoming a force for control, dominion, and subjugation. This shift contradicts the monotheism found in the gospel, from the Exodus to the Christ event, and has turned colonial and imperialistic. In essence, our monotheism



seems to imply that God has abandoned the world, favouring an ethereal abode beyond the stars or a disembodied “spiritual” temple in our hearts. This reinterpretation of monotheism has stripped the sea, earth, and sky of their mystique, rendering them mere objects of human conquest, domination, and exploitation. This departure from the basic biblical theology of creation has given rise to what I term, “mammomania”—the human mania for profit, fame, and power.

Thirdly, “mammomania,” which characterizes our current stage of the Anthropocene is, by intent, design and spirit, guilty of idolatry. Some also argue that a strand within Evangelical Christianity played a role in setting the stage for profit worship. Seeking to prove their election by God and alleviate spiritual anxieties, they pursued wealth through a fiercely individualistic and industrious work ethic, which became synonymous with divine favour. Consequently, this pursuit led to the development of a profit motive and a capitalist culture that eventually evolved into monopoly capitalism and neoliberalism. In summary, this profit-driven culture and economic system have been complicit in environmental plunder, contributing immensely to, if not the co-authoring, our current climate emergency.

Ironically and tragically, what initially began as a human response to God has evolved into the worship of mammon.

Christianity needs to revisit and rethink its fundamental anthropological assertions; re-evaluate the significance of the “wilderness” in Judaeo-Christian texts; the embodiment of God in Jesus; the ecological soteriology of the Apostle Paul; and the apocalyptic visions of the persecuted church. Additionally, for Protestants, it is imperative to explore the ecological theologies of the 16<sup>th</sup>-century Reformers, as well as the Protestant mystics who delved deep into the reality of a sacramental universe.

Perhaps, just as we rediscovered the Bible through our engagement with the poor and their quest for justice, we should also re-examine indigenous spiritualities and faith traditions. These traditions are intimately connected with the Earth, and through our interactions with indigenous communities, we may rediscover what the Judaeo-Christian faith affirms as God’s will regarding ecological justice. There is much to unlearn from our tradition and much to learn from others. The thematic emphasis of this conference is guiding us toward that path.

Allow me to turn to indigenous spirituality, specifically focusing on the Ygollotes, or “mountain dwellers,” in the Philippines, and how they

reaffirm what we, in the Christian tradition, confess as God's will. I want us to explore affirming God's will not only through the planting of the Christian cross but through the planting of the Southeast Asian pagan reed sticks as well, a ritual practised by indigenous communities in the highlands of the Northern Philippines known as the "*Pudong*".

### **The *Pudong* Rite**

The *Pudong* consists of bundled reed sticks with knotted ends, often installed in places where communities gather for rituals or at the entrances and walkways of villages. The *Pudong* symbolises divine protection over dwellings and the people they shelter, ensuring that no property or person will be trespassed or violated during gatherings. Those who disregard the boundaries set by the *Pudong* would face the wrath of the spirits [or the Nats in other SE Asian cultures]<sup>1</sup>.

Numerous rites in the mountain region are closely linked to the *Pudong*, emphasising its role as a ritual practice that designates specific days and spaces as hallowed. It calls for the cessation of work, including the exploitation of the earth, reminding the community about the importance of living harmoniously. Furthermore, the *Pudong* signifies comprehensive rest for all beings and objects and serves as a ritual of communion with ancestral and nature spirits.<sup>2</sup>

### **The *Pudong* in Context**

In April 2021, then-Philippines President Rodrigo Duterte lifted the nine-year ban on new mining deals, reviving projects like the Gened 1 and 2 hydroelectric power projects in the Apayao-Abulug River system. In December 2022, Duterte also lifted the ban on open-pit mining. These developments occurred amid the ongoing COVID-19 global pandemic, redefining for the country what the "new normal" is in the post-pandemic Philippines. These circumstances set the immediate context for my re-introducing the *Pudong* rite of the Ygollotes and exploring its implications for understanding God's will in our climate-emergency world today.

Is there a connection between the planting of the Christian conquistador's cross and colonial Christianity's silence regarding the destruction of our mountains and rainforests? Have we reached a point where we must

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<sup>1</sup> Carmencita Cawed, *The Culture of the Bontoc Igorot*, 1972, 32

<sup>2</sup> Ferdinand Anno, "On Earth as in Heaven," in *Decolonizing Ecotheology: Indigenous and Subaltern Challenges*, 2022, 77-92.

uproot the cross and plant the *Pudong* of the Igorots instead? What does it mean when an Igorot plants the *Pudong* on the ground? Is this ritual unrelated to the clear and present danger facing our planet?

This paper delves into how the *Pudong* rite can help us reconsider our ecumenical affirmation of what God wills for us at this “post-human” juncture in our planetary history, understanding “post-human” in terms of its ecological sense and its challenge to the anthropocentrism of our eschatological imagination.

When the Ygollotes gather en masse, they prominently plant or install a *Pudong* nearby or at the village entrance and exit for all to see. On rest days, this marks the commencement of the Sabbath. Planting the *Pudong* is accompanied by prayers, inviting everyone, seen and unseen, to protect the houses, gardens, farms, livestock, and properties left behind during gatherings. Among the Ygollotes of the southern mountains (Ibalois of southern Benguet), the *Pudong* sticks form a gateway through which ancestral spirits commune with the living. This communion prompts a solemn pause in all activities. When the *Pudong* stands, the entire earth and all life rest. Considering this description, I propose five theses below that affirm God’s will and design concerning our current ecological reality, resonating with our Judeo-Christian scriptures. Additionally, this ritual can foster a much-needed spirituality to heal and care for our damaged earth, caused by a colonial Christian attitude towards the non-human environment.

### **When we plant the *Pudong*, we call for people to become a community again**

The *Pudong* signals a movement from separation to communion. When knotted and stuck on the ground, the *Pudong* calls on the people to come together as one nation [a *sinpangili*], a community where social differentiation is suspended. The ritual action/object declares that the community bond is stronger than the enticements of “correct religion”, money, and power and that indigenous communities can be united in solidarity in upholding their rights to their ancestral lands and self-determination; the contemporary politics of development divide. Using patronage politics, the developmental dispensation breeds its partisans from among the indigenous populations, marginalizes the voices of many, and tries to undermine indigenous political processes.

Moreover, the Ygollotes believe that the *Pudong* is a gateway through which ancestral spirits come by to commune with the living. What this

means is the expansion of the natives' communal self-understanding. In this ritual, all creatures are reminded of their sharing of the land and this life with ancestral spirits and that the living must relate with them in filial reverence.

Under the guise of Christianisation, the colonial government and missionary organisations have become aggressive in their cultural re-engineering programmes designed to destroy the communities' resistance. These included Christian religious education, spiritual formation, and allied programmes aimed at erasing the Igorot's indigenous memory and identity. Together with the establishment of a public education system, Christianisation became the proverbial Trojan Horse employed to help disorient the natives away from their indigeneity and spirituality toward submission to a new colonial identity, a "Euro-Christian" cosmology and way of life. Today, missionary conquests<sup>3</sup> continue mainly through the evangelization work of free evangelical churches; this time, they have been joined by big business and government agencies dedicated to crushing the Communist insurgency [like the National Commission on Indigenous Peoples (NCIP) and the National Task Force to End Local Communist Armed Conflict]. Together, these groups put up cultural and political barriers to foil the attempts of organized Ygollotes groups to come together in a pan-Cordilleran *sinpangili* (united community/one nation) in defence of the Igorot homeland.<sup>4</sup> Practised almost everywhere in the mountain region, the planting of the *Pudong* reminds the Ygollotes that they are one and their security lies not in those whose agenda is to sever their culto-spiritual relationship with the earth but in the religious and proper observance of the rites of radical connectivity with the earth.

### **When we plant the *Pudong*, we declare the land and all its inhabitants as holy**

When colonial Christianity made its entry into the Philippines and proclaimed that *Kabunian*, the native name for divinity, was no longer in control, asserting that the "One True God" of Christianity alone was holy, the owner of everything, and knowable solely through the Christian faith, it resulted in the disenchantment and desacralization of everything and everyone in the land. Effectively, the land became reduced to a mere

<sup>3</sup> So named by Tinker in the North American context. See George Tinker, *Missionary Conquest: the Gospel and Native American Cultural Genocide*, 1993.

<sup>4</sup> The pan-Cordilleran project, or the idea of "kalgorotan" (the various ethnolinguistic groups in the Cordillera region as one nation) pushed by various groups to collectively resist development aggression has been labeled by the officials of the NCIP as "Communitistic". See <https://www.facebook.com/manja.bayang/videos/10157881250706899/>

resource for human exploitation in pursuit of their own “flourishing”. More pointedly, I contend that Christianity’s radical monotheism played a role in the eventual exploitation of the Gran Cordillera.<sup>5</sup>

When we designate things as holy, we are filled with awe for them. We are bound by a sense of reverence, committed to preserving them in their pristine state as much as possible. We take on the role of protectors, coexisting harmoniously, celebrating their power, and partaking in festivities around them as they bestow their graces and blessings upon us. Simultaneously, we strive for restitution and equilibrium when we transgress against them. This is precisely the essence of the *Pudong* planting ritual: it proclaims the land and all its inhabitants as sacred. This proclamation carries profound implications for our relationship with the land and all its living beings, guiding our conduct towards them.

In direct contrast to the desacralization of the land and its creatures, the act of planting the *Pudong* serves as a reaffirmation of the inherent sanctity that the land and its inhabitants have always possessed but was forgotten due to the advent of the Christian colonial approach, which singularly emphasised the “One True God” of the proclaimed “one true religion.” The planting of the *Pudong* serves as a reminder of our need to recognize the sacredness inherent in all that surrounds us and underscores the respect that is rightfully owed to them. This leads me to my third thesis.

### **When we plant the *Pudong*, we “re-sacralize” the profaned earth**

To the indigenous person, the land is inherently sacred, and ritual performances like the *Pudong* serve as occasions for the public affirmation of this profound reality. The act of planting the *Pudong* reclaims and celebrates the existence of a cultic relationship between the earth and its caretakers, a mutual bond designed to sustain life. For local priests or shamans, this connection is conceived in the mind of divinity.

The current neoliberal order heavily relies on the exploitation of the earth and its resources. Consequently, major corporations, bureaucrats, and their cultural agents employ every conceivable means, including fascist repression and militarization, to “manufacture people’s consent.” Cultural organisations, including religious groups, are increasingly co-opted into this social project aimed at manufacturing consent and quelling resistance. Christian revivalism, with its American frontier-inspired “this-world-is-not-my-home” gospel, has not only been diminishing the

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<sup>5</sup> Appropriating the old “secularization” thesis of Harvey Cox. See *The Secular City*, 1966

significance of the non-human environment but has also ingeniously drawn upon indigenous peoples' primal spirituality to position itself as a religious alternative.

What the *Pudong* ritual conveys is the faithful affirmation that the earth is not simply a property to be trespassed upon and exploited as one pleases. It embodies the living and vibrant declaration that the earth constitutes the core of the sacred realm [or the *Kabunian* reality]. Not unlike the ancient Hebrews, the Ygollotes see the mountains as spaces where the bush eternally burns. They reveal the countenance of the divine and beckon for the removal of one's sandals. Likewise, the *Pudong* fervently proclaims, "Stay off the sacred!"

### **When we plant the *Pudong*, we declare a jubilee for the earth and all its inhabitants**

In native cosmology, the land is a living creative organism that shares the biological characteristics of other living creatures. If the human, the water buffalo, and other work animals tire, so does the land. The earth needs to rest, and so do its tillers. Even the gods and spirits need rest. In other words, the *Pudong* calls for the relief of the land and all that dwells within. A widely practised tradition that varies in execution across different communities, the planting of the *Pudong* signals the beginning of the sabbath for everyone and every creature.<sup>6</sup> Among the Ygollotes, the call to rest is so thorough that no one is allowed entry to or exit from the village throughout the sabbath [the likes of *Tengao* in the vernacular]. This is *cultus*, i.e., mutual care, at its highest symbolic form. The native's reason for being takes its cues from the people's *cultus*. The *Tengao* calls for the resting of the land. It is incumbent upon the tiller to ensure that the land is at rest. This is the native's part in its cultic relationship with the land. The *Pudong* serves to remind the tillers [the native] of their part in the covenant.

The whole Gran Cordillera chain of mountains is already partitioned by applications from multinational corporations involved in large-scale mining, logging, hydroelectric, coal, geothermal, pharmaceutical, and other extractive industries. The Philippine government's Mining Act of 1995 further intensified development aggression leaving the mountains and their tillers needing a real experience of rest.

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<sup>6</sup> The *Tengao*, *Ubaya*, or *Ngilin* are rest days that the Ygollotes of the Cordillera mountain region, particularly the Kankanaey, Bontoc, and Itneg, regularly observe. During these rest days, the *Pudong* is prominently practiced, albeit with variations in its methods, expressions, and interpretations.



One story among the Ygollotes laments that the continuous denuding of their mountain abodes made the gods and spirits flee, leaving their balding mountains devoid of divine presence.<sup>7</sup> As a result, the lands and communities living under the shadows of these mountains have been left unprotected by the gods and spirits. This state of abandonment effectively sentenced the sacrificial altars (*papattayans*) of the foothills to their death. When the gods and the spirits have flown, the altars lie idle and the religion and culture surrounding them die.

To the native, the planting of the *Pudong* is as potent a ritual as the missionary *conquistadors'* ritual of cross-planting. If the latter ritual meant the subjugation of the land and its people, the first sought to reaffirm the integrity and freedom of the land, water, sky, and people. However, if the Christian cross speaks of how God touched the ground so that the whole of creation may live life to the full, the *Pudong* participates in the mystery of that "old rugged cross" in its calling on the villages to touch the ground more intentionally and know that the earth is holy ground. Long uprooted from our Adamic selves, we need to touch the ground, remove our shoes and sandals, and see God again in the burning bush.

### **When we plant the *Pudong*, we signal the uprising of the/Lumauig's reeds**

The Ygollotes of the Cordillera mountain region include the Ifugao ethnolinguistic group. According to a traditional tale recounted by the Ifugao-Igorot, at the dawn of time, the earth was an untamed wilderness ruled by grotesque monsters and ferocious beasts. In this primordial realm, Lumauig - god of the mountain - descended from on high into the valleys and plains below. It was there that Lumauig gathered all of the reeds (known as *Pudong*) that had been trampled upon by these creatures. Lumauig divided the reeds into halves and scattered them throughout the world. Upon ascending Mount Polis, Lumauig let out a thunderous roar that reverberated across the Earth, commanding, "rise and speak!" The reeds metamorphosed into human beings and transformed into people, becoming the inhabitants of the Earth.<sup>8</sup>

A political-theological continuum exists between the *Pudong* ritual and the uprising of the reeds. When taken to its logical conclusion, the *Pudong's* call for rest resonates as an invitation to conversion or

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<sup>7</sup> Among the Bago Igorots (Amburayan Kankanaey). See Florentino Hornedo, *The Favor of the Gods: Essays in Filipino Religious Thought and Behavior*, 2001

<sup>8</sup> See F. Landa Jocano, *Myths and Legends of the Early Filipinos*, 1971.

a return to the moment when the reeds were broken and set free. Colonialism, Christianisation, and the “Capitalocene” have rendered the indigenous people as withered reeds. The *Pudong* rite, planted in the mountain range where Mount Polis stands, evokes the memory of reeds becoming people, their rise, and their proclamation of truth to power. In the lowlands, Philippine Christianity found redemption by rising “from below,” from the same soil where the first Christian cross was planted. Similarly, the planting of the *Pudong* signifies the resurgence of the native people, the earth’s custodians, bearing witness to the gospel of the old rugged cross in a foreign “language.”

This indigenous story of Earth’s creation is frequently revisited by organized communities who see its relevance in the Ygollotes’ imperative to rise and confront colonial aggression from the state, big businesses, and religious organisations antagonistic to their earth-centred spiritual beliefs. Christianity can rediscover in both the *Pudong* ritual and narrative an anthropological affirmation more aligned with the eco-centric and egalitarian ideals found in Christian scriptures, as opposed to the anthropocentric and male-centred cosmologies of imperial Christianity.

## Conclusion

To summarise my presentation, the *Pudong* ritual among the Ygollotes in the Philippines offers us profound insights into redefining our understanding of God’s will in the context of our contemporary climate-emergency world. This indigenous practice challenges us to revisit our ecumenical affirmations vis-a-vis God’s design for life, particularly in light of the ecological crises we face today.

The *Pudong* calls us to come together as a community, transcending social divisions and the political machinations of imperial greed, recognizing the strength of solidarity and the importance of upholding indigenous peoples’ rights and their struggles for self-determination.

Secondly, the *Pudong*, like the Hebrew Psalmists (Ps 24: 1–6) declare the earth and all its inhabitants as holy, challenging the historical desacralization of the Earth and inspiring us to respect, protect and celebrate the sacredness inherent in all living beings.

Thirdly, the ritual highlights the need to “re-sacralize” the profaned Earth, countering the rampant exploitation of natural resources and affirming the Earth’s central role in our spiritual lives.

Fourthly, the *Pudong* encourages us to embrace a jubilee for the Earth and all that dwell therein, recognizing the necessity of rest and restoration for the land, its tillers, and all living creatures.

Finally, the *Pudong* ritual also reminds us of our transformation from wilting reeds into people, symbolizing the potential for indigenous resurgence and a return to our more zoe-centric ecological consciousness.

In the face of ongoing environmental degradation, the *Pudong* ritual allows us to re-connect to and be refreshed anew by our primal faith affirmation, “the Earth is God’s—inviting us to touch the sacred earth and take root, anew. In the planting of the *Pudong*, we are challenged to align our actions with the divine will and re-evaluate our relationship with the Earth as understood through the lens of community and solidarity in God’s Oikos. Here, the *Pudong* comes as a rite of hope and a catalyst in our work to help renew and restore God’s garden.

In its planting, the *Pudong* prompts us to pray the ancient prayer of Christianity, “Your will be done on Earth as in heaven” in our rising and speaking for a fuller life for all.

## **Thematic Presentation - IV**

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### ***Sub-Theme II:***

## **Interfaith Perspectives on Renewal and Restoration of Creation:**

### **Dwelling in Harmony Environmental Conservation in Buddhism**

**Rev. Kekirawe Sudassana Thero**

*University of Kelaniya, Sri Lanka*

In Buddhism, humans and all animals are discussed extensively in the Metta Sutra. Buddhism rejects caste and race. Buddhism says that race or caste can only be used for trees and animals. It cannot be used for humans. (Vasetta Sutra).

It is the responsibility of the government to protect the lives of all animals including humans. Chakkavatti Sihananda Sutra discusses the policies of the state.

Everyone is afraid of punishment, afraid of death. Buddhism fully says to look at society with kindness.

Due to the inability to read Buddhism in Sri Lanka in a correct way, many ethnic crises arose—Black July (1983) and the Sri Lankan Civil War (which lasted over 30 years).

### **Natural Environmental Conservation in Buddhism**

Buddha's birth, enlightenment, and death all happened in the natural environment. The life of a Buddhist monk is connected with the environment.

However, the people have not grasped the Buddhist teachings about Sri Lanka's environment. Water pollution, deforestation, and the killing of wild animals are frequent in Sri Lanka.

The Four Noble Truths of Buddhism can be used to solve ethnic and environmental crises in Sri Lanka: (1) the crisis, (2) the cause of the crisis, (3) solving the crisis, and (4) the way to solve the crisis. These four theories are practical methods that can be used to solve any crisis. Unfortunately, Sri Lanka is a Buddhist country but fails to use this.

## **Thematic Presentation - V**

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### ***Sub-Theme II:***

## **Interfaith Perspectives on Renewal and Restoration of Creation:**

### **Dwelling in Harmony Islamic Perspective on Living in Harmony**

**Dr Citra Fitri Agustina**

*Nahdlatul Ulama, Indonesia*

#### **Nahdlatul Ulama (Awakening Ulama)**

- Nahdlatul Ulama, or NU, was founded in 1926 in reaction to the Saudi conquest of Mecca and Medina with their rigid understanding of Islam. It follows mainstream Sunni Islam while embracing Islamic spirituality and accepting Indonesia's cultural traditions.
- A religious and community organisation also often referred to as "Jam'oyyah Diniyyah Ijtima'iyah".
- The NU religious movement adheres to the Ahlus-sunnah Wal Jamaah ideology in the social aspect of society.
- NU is known as an organisation that cares for traditions, such as the tradition of tolerance and pluralism, both of which have been practiced for a long time. However, NU is also open to modernity and new innovations to better serve the nation.

#### **NU At a Glance**

- With more than 50 million ardent members in Indonesia, NU is the largest religious and community organisation in the country.
- NU's organisation is supported by 33 provincial offices (PW-NU) (now becoming 38 provinces) coordinating activities in all provinces in Indonesia, 400 branch offices in the districts/cities (PC-NU), 2,630 sub-district offices (MWC-NU), and 37,125 village offices (Ranting-NU), and 12 overseas branch offices (PCI-NU).
- With these resources, NU has been considered an organisation that can serve as the guardian of the state ideology (Pancasila) and constitution (Undang-Undang Dasar, 1945).

## Basic Values of NU

- Tasamuh: tolerant
- Tawassuth: moderate
- I'tidal: consistent
- Tawazun: harmonious

### 1. Tasamuh

- With Arabic origins, Tasamuh is to behave well, to forgive each other, and to behave gently.
- In general, tasamuh is a commendable attitude or morality in social life, where there is mutual respect within the limits set in Islam.
- Tasamuh is very important in our lives; when associating and interacting with other people, there is often friction or even misunderstandings that sometimes lead to fights. So, in this case, it is very important to have the character and attitude of tasamuh or mutual forgiveness so that peace can still be realised and maintained.
- Hadith of Prophet Muhammad: “Be brother servants of Allah”.

### 2. Tawassuth

- At-tawassuth means a moderate attitude, neither the left extreme nor the right extreme.
- This principle is primarily based on a verse in the Qur'an: And thus have we made you an ummat of middling stand that you may be witnesses over mankind, and the messenger may be (a) witness over you. (QS al-Baqarah: 143)

### 3. Tawazun

- At-tawazun means staying balanced in everything, including in using rational “dalil aqli” justifications and religious “dalil naqli” justifications (based on the Qur'an and Sunnah).
- Allah SWT said in the Qur'an: We have surely sent our messengers with clear signs, and sent them with the Book and the Balance, so that man may stand by justice. (QS al-Hadid: 25)



#### **4. I'tidal**

- Al-i'tidal is the maintenance of harmony.
- In the Quran, Allah SWT said: Oh you who believe, stand firmly for Allah with justice and let not the enmity of a nation cause you to do injustice. Do justice that is approximate to piety, and be afraid of Allah. No doubt Allah is khabir (well-acquainted) with all that you do. (QS al-Maidah: 8)
- Allah SWT said in the Qur'an: And speak to him mildly, perhaps he may accept admonition or fear Allah. (QS Thaha: 44)
- This verse talks about the command of Allah SWT to Prophet Moses (AS) and Prophet Harun (AS) in order to speak to Fir'aun mildly. Al Hafizh Ibnu Katsir (701–774 H / 1302–1373) as explaining this verse said, "Indeed the dakwa of Prophet Moses (AS) and Prophet Harun (AS) to Fir'aun is by using blessing, soft, easy, and friendly words. All this is intended to expectedly be more heart-touching, acceptable, and beneficial." (Tafsir al-Qur'anil 'Azhim, Vol. III, p.206)

#### **On a Practical Level**

##### **1. Akidah (creed)**

- Balance in using reasoning or rational faculties-based justifications (dalil aqli) and religious texts-based justifications (dalil naqli).
- Purifying the creed from outside influences.
- Being careful in declaring such edicts as syirik (polytheism, idolatry), bid'ah (heresy), and kaffir (infidel).

##### **2. Syari'ah**

- Holding firmly to the Qur'an and the Sunnah by meticulously using reliable scientific methods.
- Rational faculties can only be used in regard with such matters having no clear (sharih/qoth'i) explanations in the nash (religious texts).
- Being able to accept any dissenting opinion in dealing with matters which possibly have interpretable justifications (zhanni).

### **3. Tasawuf**

- Not banning and even calling for any effort in exploring and practicing Islamic teachings as long as using such approaches as are not opposed to the principles of Islam.
- Banning excessive attitudes (ghuluw) in evaluating anything.
- Holding firmly to such glorious attitudes as syaja'ah (have the courage), tawadlu (modesty), and philanthropy.

### **4. Social Interaction**

- Acknowledging the nature of human beings whose tendency is to gather and socialise in accordance with their own binding elements.
- Developing tolerance in other different groups.
- Social interaction should be based on mutual understanding and appreciation.
- Taking a firm stance against those really fighting against Islam.

### **5. In National Life**

- The Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia (NKRI) should be defended because it constitutes a consensus of all the nation's elements.
- Always obeying and abiding by the government's rules as long as they are not opposed to the teaching of Islam.
- Not getting involved in any rebellion or carrying out a coup d'état against the legal government.
- Giving warnings mildly to the government when considered to have committed deviations.

### **6. Culture**

- Culture should be positioned as proportionally as possible and is evaluated and measured in accordance with the norms and religious laws.

- Good cultural practices, as long as they are not opposed to religious values, are acceptable wherever they are from. Otherwise, any bad cultural practice should be given up.
- Being able to accept any new good culture and preserving old cultures which are still relevant (al-muhafazhatu 'alal qadimis halih wal akhdu bil jadidil ashlah).

## 7. Dakwah (Preaching)

- Dakwa is not intended to sentence or declare one as guilty. Rather it aims to call on people to do good deeds blessed by God.
- Dakwa is conducted to meet clear purposes and goals.
- Dakwa is conducted through good guidance and clear words in accordance with the local conditions or targeted audience.

## Role of NU

- Banom—autonomous body (by gender or by similarity)
- 18 departments relating to health, climate change, dakwah, education, etc.



## Islam and Maqasid Syariah

- The basic concept of Maqasid As-Syariah is achieving inner benefit in order to maintain syara' goals.
- Maqsid means goals while syari'ah is defined as a way towards safety. This is to protect from danger and harm.
- Maqasid As-syariah includes five basic principles (aldharuriyah al-khomasah):
  1. Preserving religion (hifz ad-din)
  2. Maintaining the soul (hifz an-nafs)
  3. Maintaining the mind (hifz al-aql)
  4. Nurturing offspring (hifz an-basb)
  5. Maintaining assets (hifz al-mal)

## Islam and NU

- Islam, however, has multiple interpretations. A humanitarian interpretation, focusing on 'rahmah', loosely translated as love and compassion, has been emphasised by Nahdlatul Ulama, which literally means 'reawakening of the Islamic scholars'. NU was founded in 1926 in reaction to the Saudi conquest of Mecca and Medina with their rigid understanding of Islam. It follows mainstream Sunni Islam, while embracing Islamic spirituality and accepting Indonesia's cultural traditions
- Functioning in Indonesia, the country with the largest Muslim population, Nahdlatul Ulama is the world's biggest Islamic organisation with about 90 million members and followers. In terms of membership, the organisation hugely outstrips that of the Taliban—yet, this face of Islam has not been sufficiently recognised on the international stage.
- In 2014, NU responded to the rise of the Islamic State group and its radical ideology by initiating Islamic reform. Since then, it has elaborated on this reform that it calls 'Humanitarian Islam'.

## Islam in Indonesia

- Indonesia's foundational credo, Pancasila, means 'five principles' and basically refers to the belief in God, humanitarianism, Indonesia's national unity, democracy, and social justice.

- About 88 percent of Indonesia's population of 270 million are Muslim. Both Nahdlatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah, the country's second-biggest Islamic organisation, have been respectful of these principles. Like NU, Muhammadiyah also has tens of millions of followers, and these two organisations often cooperate against radical Islamist groups.
- Robert Hefner, a leading expert on Indonesia, documents in his 2000 book 'Civil Islam' how NU and Muhammadiyah made important contributions to the country's democratisation in the late 1990s. During this process, the leader of NU, Abdurrahman Wahid, became Indonesia's first democratically elected president in 1999.
- Abdurrahman Wahid, who died in 2009, left a religious legacy too. During my conversations, senior NU members repeatedly referred to Wahid's reformist ideas as the main source of inspiration for Humanitarian Islam.

### **Influencing the Middle East**

- This reform movement's reception in the Middle East, the historical centre of Islam, is important if it is to have a global impact. Humanitarian Islam has been mostly ignored by scholars and governments of Middle Eastern countries, who generally see it as a competitor of their own attempts to influence the Muslim world.
- As an NGO initiative, Humanitarian Islam is different from Middle Eastern efforts to shape the Muslim world, which are mostly government-led schemes.
- With its reformist emphasis, Humanitarian Islam may appeal to some young Middle Eastern Muslims who are discontented with their countries' political and conservative interpretations of Islam.
- In order to reach a Middle Eastern audience, the Humanitarian Islam movement is launching an Arabic-language version of its English website. Whether this Indonesian initiative can have an impact in the Middle East and become a truly global movement for Islamic reform remains to be seen.

## **Islam, NU, and the World**

- Sent some pesantren teachers to UK to join Education Management Training at Leeds University (2004–2009)
- Developing international branches (Pengarus Cabang Istimewa NU); around 31 in UK, Malaysia, KSA, India
- Synergy with other faith-based organisations
- Collaborating with other nations, such as the Chinese embassy, to build sanitation and water treatment plants



## Thematic Presentation - VI

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### *Sub-Theme II:*

### **Interfaith Perspectives on Renewal and Restoration of Creation:**

### **Sikh Perspective on Dwelling in Harmony**

**Sardar Sajjan Singh**

*Sikh Heritage Foundation Hyderabad Deccan, India*

The Message of Sri Guru Granth Sahib ji on “Affirmation of the will of God”, “Dwelling in Harmony with Creations” and “Attaining life in its Fullness”.

#### **Guru Nanak's Concept of God.**

The Sikh concept of ultimate Reality or God is more akin to the Judaic notion of an Almighty person than to the Aryan concept of an imminent neutral principle. In the opening stanza of Sri Guru Granth Sahib ji, God is defined as:

ੴ ਸਤਿ ਨਾਮੁ ਕਰਤਾ ਪੁਰਖੁ ਨਿਰਭਉ ਨਿਰਵੈਰੁ  
ਅਕਾਲ ਮੂਰਤਿ ਅਜੂਨੀ ਸੈਭੰ ਗੁਰ ਪ੍ਰਸਾਦਿ ॥

One Universal Creator God, The Name is Truth Creative Being  
Personified

No Fear No Hatred Image of the Undying, Beyond Birth, Self-Existent. By  
Guru's Grace~

This is “Mool Mantar” (also spelt Mul Mantra), the most important composition contained within the Sri Guru Granth Sahib, the holy scripture of the Sikhs; it is the basis of Sikhism. The word “Mool” means “main”, “root” or “chief” and “Mantar” means “magic chant” or “magic portion”.

Together the words “Mool Mantar” mean the “Main chant” or “root verse”. Its importance is emphasised by the fact that it is the first composition to appear in the holy Granth of the Sikhs and that it appears before the commencement of the main section which comprises 31 Raags (Musical Notes) or chapters.

The Mool Mantar is said to be the first composition uttered by Guru Nanak Dev upon enlightenment at the age of about 30. Being the basis

of Sikhism, it encapsulates the entire theology of Sikhism. When a person begins to learn Gurbani, this is the first verse that most would learn. It is a most brief composition encompassing the entire universally complex theology of the Sikh faith. It has religious, social, political, logical, martial and eternal implications for human existence; a truly humanitarian and global concept of the Supreme power for all to understand and appreciate.

This Mantar encompasses concepts which have been evaluated and proven over many eras (or yugs) and are known to be flawless beyond any ambiguity whatsoever. The rest of the Japji sahib that follows this mantar is said to be an elaboration of the main mantar and the rest of the Guru Granth Sahib totalling 1430 pages, is a detailed amplification of the Mool Mantar.

### **Guru Gobind Singh's Concept of God**

Guru Gobind Singh describes God in Jaap Sahib as follows:

ਚਕ੍ਰ ਚਿਹਨ ਅਰੁ ਬਰਨ ਜਾਤਿ ਅਰੁ ਪਾਤਿ ਨਹਿਨ ਜਿਹ ॥  
 ਰੂਪ ਰੰਗ ਅਰੁ ਰੇਖ ਭੇਖ ਕੇਉ ਕਹਿ ਨ ਸਕਤਿ ਕਿਹੁ ॥  
 ਅਚਲ ਮੂਰਤਿ ਅਨਭਵ ਪ੍ਰਕਾਸ ਅਮਿਤੋਜ ਕਹਿਜੈ ॥  
 ਕੋਟਿ ਇੰਦ੍ਰ ਇੰਦ੍ਰਾਣਿ ਸਾਹੁ ਸਾਹਾਣਿ ਗਣਿਜੈ ॥  
 ਤ੍ਰਿਭੁਵਣ ਮਹੀਪ ਸੂਰ ਨਰ ਅਸੁਰ ਨੇਤਿ ਨੇਤਿ ਬਨ ਤ੍ਰਿਣ ਕਹਤ ॥  
 ਤ੍ਰੈ ਸਰਬ ਨਾਮ ਕਥੈ ਕਵਨ ਕਰਮ ਨਾਮ ਬਰਣਤ ਸੁਮਤਿ ॥੧॥

Who is without form or figure, without shade or caste or creed.  
 Whose complexion or colour, dress or design, one cannot describe.

Eternal, the Source of His own Light,  
 Eternal, the Source of His own Light,  
 Beyond measure, beyond all space.

King of kings, Indra of Indras,  
 Sovereign of the Three Universes, gods, demons, men, all proclaim  
 together.

He is neither this nor that, none can define Him.  
 Neither nature nor culture can delineate His Being (1)

### **Creator Function of God in Sri Guru Granth Saheb Ji**

ਹੁਕਮੀ ਹੋਵਨਿ ਆਕਾਰ ਹੁਕਮੁ ਨ ਕਹਿਆ ਜਾਈ ॥

By His Command, bodies are created; His Command cannot be  
 described.

ਆਪੀਨ੍ਹੈ ਆਪੁ ਸਾਜਿਓ ਆਪੀਨ੍ਹੈ ਰਚਿਓ ਨਾਉ ॥  
 ਦੁਯੀ ਕੁਦਰਤਿ ਸਾਜੀਐ ਕਰਿ ਆਸਣੁ ਡਿਠੇ ਚਾਉ ॥

ਦਾਤਾ ਕਰਤਾ ਆਪਿ ਤੂੰ ਤੁਸਿ ਦੇਵਹਿ ਕਰਹਿ ਪਸਾਉ ॥  
ਤੂੰ ਜਾਣੇਈ ਸਭਸੈ ਦੇ ਲੈਸਹਿ ਜਿੰਦੁ ਕਵਾਉ ॥

He Himself created Himself;

He Himself assumed His Name.

Secondly, He fashioned the creation;

Seated within the creation,

He beholds it with delight.

‘Sukhmani Sahib’ is a Psalm of Peace: As weak beings, we are full of attachments and desires. In a World of illusion or Maya, we forget the Creator, while engrossed in His Creation. Only with His Grace and complete surrender to His Will one can overcome evils like anger, greed, attachments and desires. Sukhmani Sahib is recorded in 24 Paudi (Steps), each having Eight Ashtapadi (8 stages), enumerating the Creator /Lord.

The Creator’s creation is omnipresent everywhere in the Universe and is recorded by the Fifth Sikh Guru Arjan Dev ji in the 10<sup>th</sup> Paudi of Sukhmani Sahib.

ਸਲੋਕੁ ॥ ਉਸਤਤਿ ਕਰਹਿ ਅਨੇਕ ਜਨ ਅੰਤੁ ਨ ਪਾਰਾਵਾਰੁ ॥ ਨਾਨਕ ਰਚਨਾ ਪ੍ਰਭਿ ਰਚੀ  
ਬਹੁ ਬਿਧਿ ਅਨਿਕ ਪ੍ਰਕਾਰ ॥੧॥ {ਪੰਨਾ 275}

Many people praise the Lord. He has no end or limitation.

ਅਸਟਪਦੀ ॥  
ਕਈ ਕੋਟਿ ਹੋਏ ਪੁਜਾਰੀ ॥  
ਕਈ ਕੋਟਿ ਆਚਾਰ ਬਿਉਹਾਰੀ ॥  
ਕਈ ਕੋਟਿ ਭਏ ਤੀਰਥ ਵਾਸੀ ॥  
ਕਈ ਕੋਟਿ ਬਨ ਭ੍ਰਮਹਿ ਉਦਾਸੀ ॥  
ਕਈ ਕੋਟਿ ਬੰਦ ਕੇ ਸੈਤੇ ॥  
ਕਈ ਕੋਟਿ ਤਪੀਸੁਰ ਹੋਤੇ ॥  
ਕਈ ਕੋਟਿ ਆਤਮ ਧਿਆਨੁ ਧਾਰਹਿ ॥  
ਕਈ ਕੋਟਿ ਕਬਿ ਕਾਬਿ ਬੀਚਾਰਹਿ ॥  
ਕਈ ਕੋਟਿ ਨਵਤਨ ਨਾਮ ਧਿਆਵਹਿ ॥  
ਨਾਨਕ ਕਰਤੇ ਕਾ ਅੰਤੁ ਨ ਪਾਵਹਿ ॥੧॥

Ashtapadee: (8 stanzas)

Many millions are His devotees.

Many millions perform religious rituals and worldly duties.

Many millions become dwellers at sacred shrines of pilgrimage.

Many millions wander as renunciates in the wilderness.

Many millions listen to the Vedas.

Many millions become austere penitents.

Many millions enshrine meditation within their souls.

Many millions of poets contemplate Him through poetry.  
 Many millions meditate on His eternally new Naam.  
 O Nanak, none can find the limits of the Creator. || 1 ||

ਕਈ ਕੋਟਿ ਭਏ ਅਭਿਮਾਨੀ ॥  
 ਕਈ ਕੋਟਿ ਅੰਧ ਅਗਿਆਨੀ ॥  
 ਕਈ ਕੋਟਿ ਕਿਰਪਨ ਕਠੋਰ ॥  
 ਕਈ ਕੋਟਿ ਅਭਿਗ ਆਤਮ ਨਿਕੋਰ ॥  
 ਕਈ ਕੋਟਿ ਪਰ ਦਰਬ ਕਉ ਹਿਰਹਿ ॥  
 ਕਈ ਕੋਟਿ ਪਰ ਦੂਖਨਾ ਕਰਹਿ ॥  
 ਕਈ ਕੋਟਿ ਮਾਇਆ ਸ੍ਰਮ ਮਾਹਿ ॥  
 ਕਈ ਕੋਟਿ ਪਰਦੇਸ ਭ੍ਰਮਾਹਿ ॥  
 ਜਿਤੁ ਜਿਤੁ ਲਾਵਹੁ ਤਿਤੁ ਤਿਤੁ ਲਗਨਾ ॥  
 ਨਾਨਕ ਕਰਤੇ ਕੀ ਜਾਨੈ ਕਰਤਾ ਰਚਨਾ ॥੨॥

Many millions become self-centred.  
 Many millions are blinded by ignorance.  
 Many millions are stone-hearted misers.  
 Many millions are heartless, with dry, withered souls.  
 Many millions steal the wealth of others.  
 Many millions slander others.  
 Many millions struggle in Maya.  
 Many millions wander in foreign lands.

Whatever God attaches them to—with that they are engaged.  
 O Nanak, the Creator alone knows the workings of His creation. || 2 ||

ਕਈ ਕੋਟਿ ਸਿਧ ਜਤੀ ਜੋਗੀ ॥  
 ਕਈ ਕੋਟਿ ਰਾਜੇ ਰਸ ਭੋਗੀ ॥  
 ਕਈ ਕੋਟਿ ਪੰਖੀ ਸਰਪ ਉਪਾਏ ॥  
 ਕਈ ਕੋਟਿ ਪਾਥਰ ਬਿਰਖ ਨਿਪਜਾਏ ॥  
 ਕਈ ਕੋਟਿ ਪਵਣ ਪਾਣੀ ਬੈਸੰਤਰ ॥  
 ਕਈ ਕੋਟਿ ਦੇਸ ਭੂ ਮੰਡਲ ॥  
 ਕਈ ਕੋਟਿ ਸਸੀਅਰ ਸੂਰ ਨਖਯਤ੍ਰ ॥  
 ਕਈ ਕੋਟਿ ਦੇਵ ਦਾਨਵ ਇੰਦ੍ਰ ਸਿਰਿ ਛਤ੍ਰ ॥  
 ਸਗਲ ਸਮਗੀ ਅਪਨੈ ਸੁਤਿ ਧਾਰੈ ॥  
 ਨਾਨਕ ਜਿਸੁ ਜਿਸੁ ਭਾਵੈ ਤਿਸੁ ਤਿਸੁ ਨਿਸਤਾਰੈ ॥੩॥

Many millions are Siddhas, celibates and Yogis.  
 Many millions are kings, enjoying worldly pleasures.  
 Many millions of birds and snakes have been created.  
 Many millions of stones and trees have been produced.  
 Many millions are the winds, waters and fires.  
 Many millions are the countries and realms of the world.

Many millions are the moons, suns and stars.  
 Many millions are the demi-gods, demons and Indras,  
 under their regal canopies.  
 He has strung the entire creation upon His thread.  
 O Nanak, He emancipates those with whom He is pleased. ||3||

ਕਈ ਕੋਟਿ ਰਾਜਸ ਤਾਮਸ ਸਾਤਕ ॥  
 ਕਈ ਕੋਟਿ ਬੇਦ ਪੁਰਾਨ ਸਿਮ੍ਰਿਤਿ ਅਰੁ ਸਾਸਤ ॥  
 ਕਈ ਕੋਟਿ ਕੀਏ ਰਤਨ ਸਮੁਦ ॥  
 ਕਈ ਕੋਟਿ ਨਾਨਾ ਪ੍ਰਕਾਰ ਜੰਤ ॥  
 ਕਈ ਕੋਟਿ ਕੀਏ ਚਿਰ ਜੀਵੇ ॥  
 ਕਈ ਕੋਟਿ ਗਿਰੀ ਮੇਰ ਸੁਵਰਨ ਥੀਵੇ ॥  
 ਕਈ ਕੋਟਿ ਜਖੜ ਕੰਨਰ ਪਿਸਾਚ ॥  
 ਕਈ ਕੋਟਿ ਭੂਤ ਪ੍ਰੇਤ ਸੁਕਰ ਮ੍ਰਿਗਾਚ ॥  
 ਸਭ ਤੇ ਨੇਰੈ ਸਭਹੁ ਤੇ ਦੂਰਿ ॥  
 ਨਾਨਕ ਆਪਿ ਅਲਿਪਤੁ ਰਹਿਆ ਭਰਪੂਰਿ ॥੪॥

Many millions abide in heated activity,  
 slothful darkness and peaceful light.  
 Many millions are the pearls of the oceans.  
 Many millions are the beings of so many descriptions.  
 Many millions are made long-lived.  
 Many millions of hills and mountains have been made of gold.  
 Many millions are the Yakhshas (deities)—the servants of the god of  
 wealth, the Kinnars (transgenders)—the gods of celestial music, and the  
 evil spirits of the Pisaach (vampires).  
 Many millions are the evil nature—spirits, ghosts, pigs, and tigers.  
 He is near to all, and yet far from all;  
 O Nanak, He Himself remains distinct, while yet pervading all. ||4||

ਕਈ ਕੋਟਿ ਪਾਤਾਲ ਕੇ ਵਾਸੀ ॥  
 ਕਈ ਕੋਟਿ ਨਰਕ ਸੁਰਗ ਨਿਵਾਸੀ ॥  
 ਕਈ ਕੋਟਿ ਜਨਮਹਿ ਜੀਵਹਿ ਮਰਹਿ ॥  
 ਕਈ ਕੋਟਿ ਬਹੁ ਜੋਨੀ ਫਿਰਹਿ ॥  
 ਕਈ ਕੋਟਿ ਬੈਠਤ ਹੀ ਖਾਹਿ ॥  
 ਕਈ ਕੋਟਿ ਘਾਲਹਿ ਥਕਿ ਪਾਹਿ ॥  
 ਕਈ ਕੋਟਿ ਕੀਏ ਧਨਵੰਤ ॥  
 ਕਈ ਕੋਟਿ ਮਾਇਆ ਮਹਿ ਚਿੰਤ ॥  
 ਜਹ ਜਹ ਭਾਣਾ ਤਹ ਤਹ ਰਾਖੇ ॥  
 ਨਾਨਕ ਸਭੁ ਕਿਛੁ ਪ੍ਰਭੁ ਕੈ ਹਾਥੇ ॥੫॥

Many millions inhabit the nether regions.  
 Many millions dwell in heaven and hell.

Many millions are born, live and die.  
 Many millions are reincarnated, over and over again.  
 Many millions eat while sitting at ease.  
 Many millions are exhausted by their labours.  
 Many millions are created wealthy.  
 Many millions are anxiously involved in Maya.  
 Wherever He wills, there He keeps us.  
 O Nanak, everything is in the Hands of God. ||5||

ਕਈ ਕੋਟਿ ਭਏ ਬੈਰਾਗੀ ॥  
 ਰਾਮ ਨਾਮ ਸੰਗਿ ਤਿਨਿ ਲਿਵ ਲਾਗੀ ॥  
 ਕਈ ਕੋਟਿ ਪ੍ਰਭ ਕਉ ਖੋਜੰਤੇ ॥  
 ਆਤਮ ਮਹਿ ਪਾਰਬ੍ਰਹਮੁ ਲਹੰਤੇ ॥  
 ਕਈ ਕੋਟਿ ਦਰਸਨ ਪ੍ਰਭੁ ਪਿਆਸ ॥  
 ਤਿਨ ਕਉ ਮਿਲਿਓ ਪ੍ਰਭੁ ਅਬਿਨਾਸ ॥  
 ਕਈ ਕੋਟਿ ਮਾਗਹਿ ਸਤਸੰਗੁ ॥  
 ਪਾਰਬ੍ਰਹਮ ਤਿਨ ਲਾਗਾ ਰੰਗੁ ॥  
 ਜਿਨ ਕਉ ਹੋਏ ਆਪਿ ਸੁਪ੍ਰਸੰਨ ॥  
 ਨਾਨਕ ਤੇ ਜਨ ਸਦਾ ਧਨਿ ਧੰਨਿ ॥੬॥

Many millions become Bairaagees (Detached), who renounce the world.  
 They have attached themselves to the Lord's Name.  
 Many millions are searching for God.  
 Within their souls, they find the Supreme Lord God.  
 Many millions thirst for the Blessing of God's Darshan (a view of God).  
 They meet with God, the Eternal.  
 Many millions pray for the Society of the Saints.  
 They are imbued with the Love of the Supreme Lord God.  
 Those with whom He Himself is pleased,  
 O Nanak, are blessed, forever blessed. ||6||

ਕਈ ਕੋਟਿ ਖਾਣੀ ਅਰੁ ਖੰਡ ॥  
 ਕਈ ਕੋਟਿ ਅਕਾਸ ਬ੍ਰਹਮੰਡ ॥  
 ਕਈ ਕੋਟਿ ਹੋਏ ਅਵਤਾਰ ॥  
 ਕਈ ਜੁਗਤਿ ਕੀਨੇ ਬਿਸਥਾਰ ॥  
 ਕਈ ਬਾਰ ਪਸਰਿਓ ਪਾਸਾਰ ॥  
 ਸਦਾ ਸਦਾ ਇਕੁ ਏਕੰਕਾਰ ॥  
 ਕਈ ਕੋਟਿ ਕੀਨੇ ਬਹੁ ਭਾਤਿ ॥  
 ਪ੍ਰਭ ਤੇ ਹੋਏ ਪ੍ਰਭ ਮਾਹਿ ਸਮਾਤਿ ॥  
 ਤਾ ਕਾ ਅੰਤੁ ਨ ਜਾਨੈ ਕੋਇ ॥  
 ਆਪੇ ਆਪਿ ਨਾਨਕ ਪ੍ਰਭੁ ਸੋਇ ॥੭॥

Many millions are the fields of creation and the galaxies.  
 Many millions are the etheric skies and the solar systems.



Many millions are the divine incarnations.  
 In so many ways, He has unfolded Himself.  
 So many times, He has expanded His expansion.  
 Forever and ever, He is the One, the One Universal Creator.  
 From God they emanate, and into God, they merge once again.  
 His limits are not known to anyone.  
 Of Himself, and by Himself, O Nanak, God exists. ||7||

ਕਈ ਕੋਟਿ ਪਾਰਬ੍ਰਹਮ ਕੇ ਦਾਸ ॥  
 ਤਿਨ ਹੋਵਤੁ ਆਤਮ ਪਰਗਾਸ ॥  
 ਕਈ ਕੋਟਿ ਤਤ ਕੇ ਬੇਤੇ ॥  
 ਸਦਾ ਨਿਹਾਰਹਿ ਏਕੇ ਨੇਤ੍ਰੇ ॥  
 ਕਈ ਕੋਟਿ ਨਾਮ ਰਸੁ ਪੀਵਹਿ ॥  
 ਅਮਰ ਭਏ ਸਦ ਸਦ ਹੀ ਜੀਵਹਿ ॥  
 ਕਈ ਕੋਟਿ ਨਾਮ ਗੁਨ ਗਾਵਹਿ ॥  
 ਆਤਮ ਰਸਿ ਸੁਖਿ ਸਹਜਿ ਸਮਾਵਹਿ ॥  
 ਅਪੁਨੇ ਜਨ ਕਉ ਸਾਸਿ ਸਾਸਿ ਸਮਾਰੇ ॥  
 ਨਾਨਕ ਓਇ ਪਰਮੇਸੁਰ ਕੇ ਪਿਆਰੇ ॥੮॥੧੦॥

Many millions are the servants of the Supreme Lord God.  
 Their souls are enlightened.  
 Many millions know the essence of reality.  
 Their eyes gaze forever on the One alone.  
 Many millions drink in the essence of the Naam.  
 They become immortal; they live forever and ever.  
 Many millions sing the Glorious Praises of the Naam.  
 They are absorbed in intuitive peace and pleasure.  
 He remembers His servants with each and every breath.  
 O Nanak, they are the beloveds of the Transcendent Lord God.  
 ||8||10||

### Creator's Environment

Message of Guru Nanak in Sri Guru Granth Sahib ji on page 8, on Environment:

ਸਲੋਕੁ ॥ ਪਵਣੁ ਗੁਰੂ ਪਾਣੀ ਪਿਤਾ ਮਾਤਾ ਧਰਤਿ ਮਹਤੁ ॥  
 ਦਿਵਸੁ ਰਾਤਿ ਦੁਇ ਦਾਈ ਦਾਇਆ ਖੇਲੈ ਸਗਲ ਜਗਤੁ ॥  
 ਚੰਗਿਆਈਆ ਬੁਰਿਆਈਆ ਵਾਚੈ ਧਰਮੁ ਹਦੂਰਿ ॥  
 ਕਰਮੀ ਆਪੇ ਆਪਣੀ ਕੇ ਨੇੜੇ ਕੇ ਦੂਰਿ ॥  
 ਜਿਨੀ ਨਾਮੁ ਧਿਆਇਆ ਗਏ ਮਸਕਤਿ ਘਾਲਿ ॥  
 ਨਾਨਕ ਤੋ ਮੁਖ ਉਜਲੇ ਕੇਤੀ ਛੁਟੀ ਨਾਲਿ ॥੧॥

Salok : Air is the Guru, Water is the Father, and Earth is the Great Mother of all.

Day and night are the two nurses, in whose lap all the world is at play.  
Good deeds and bad deeds-the record is read out in the Presence of the  
Lord of Dharma.

According to their own actions, some are drawn closer, and some are  
driven farther away.

Those who have meditated on the Naam, the Name of the Lord, and  
departed after having worked by the sweat of their brows  
-O Nanak, their faces are radiant in the Court of the Lord, and many are  
saved along with them! ||1||

Creations compassion is described in Sri Guru Granth Sahib ji in page  
1299:

ਕਾਨੜਾ ਮਹਲਾ ੫ ॥  
ਬਿਸਰਿ ਗਈ ਸਭ ਤਾਤਿ ਪਰਾਈ ॥ ਜਬ ਤੇ ਸਾਧਸੰਗਤਿ ਮੋਹਿ ਪਾਈ ॥੧॥ ਰਹਾਉ ॥ ਨਾ  
ਕੋ ਬੈਰੀ ਨਹੀ ਬਿਗਾਨਾ ਸਗਲ ਸੰਗਿ ਹਮ ਕਉ ਬਨਿ ਆਈ ॥੧॥ ਜੇ ਪ੍ਰਭੁ ਕੀਨੋ ਸੋ ਭਲ  
ਮਾਨਿਓ ਏਹ ਸੁਮਤਿ ਸਾਧੂ ਤੇ ਪਾਈ ॥੨॥ ਸਭ ਮਹਿ ਰਵਿ ਰਹਿਆ ਪ੍ਰਭੁ ਏਕੈ ਪੇਖਿ ਪੇਖਿ  
ਨਾਨਕ ਬਿਗਸਾਈ ॥੩॥੮॥

Kaanarraa Mehalaa 5 ||

I have totally forgotten my jealousy of others,  
Since I found the Saadh Sangat (Congregation), the Company of the  
Holy. ||1|| Pause||  
No one is my enemy, and no one is a stranger. I get along with everyone.  
||1||

Whatever God does, I accept that as good. This is the sublime wisdom I  
have obtained from the Holy. ||2||

The One God is pervading in all. Gazing upon Him, beholding Him,  
Nanak blossoms forth in happiness. ||3||8||

## Thematic Presentation - VII

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### ***Sub-Theme II:*** **Interfaith Perspectives on Renewal and Restoration of Creation:**

#### **Jain Perspective on Dwelling in Harmony**

**Dr S.S. Bhattaraka Charukeerthi Pandithacharyavarya Mahaswamiji**  
*Shree Jain Math Moodbidri, India*

Jains ritually worship numerous deities, particularly the Jinas. In Jainism, a Jina, referred to as Devadhi Deva, is not an incarnation (avatar) but represents the highest state of omniscience. An ascetic muni achieves this state by observing 'tapas' (austerities), transforming an ordinary soul into a 'mahatman'. After shedding the four ghati karmas, this soul becomes a tirthankara, or a spiritual teacher, revered as a god. Out of the 24 tirthankaras, prominent figures include Adhinath, Chandra Prabha, Parshvanatha, Neminatha, and Mahavira. Jains advocate for mutual help, love for all living beings, and the education of humanity. They follow the path of purification through Right Faith, Right Knowledge, and Right Conduct.

Jain philosophy can be explained through the Nav Tattvas or nine fundamentals:

1. Jiva (soul)
2. Ajiva (non-living matter)
3. Punya (results of good deeds)
4. Papa (results of bad deeds)
5. Asrava (influx of karmas)
6. Samvara (stoppage of karmas)
7. Bandha (bondage of karmas)
8. Nirjara (eradication of karmas)
9. Moksha (liberation)

An analogy can help illustrate these concepts. A family lives in a farmhouse enjoying a fresh, cool breeze through open doors and windows. Suddenly, a dust storm begins. Realising the severity of the storm, they rush to close the doors and windows. Despite their efforts, dust enters the house. Once the doors and windows are closed, they begin cleaning the dust to restore the house to its clean state. This process mirrors the journey of the soul in Jain philosophy, from being affected by karmas to achieving purification and liberation.

The analogy relates to the nine fundamentals (Nav Tattvas) as follows:

1. Jivas (souls): represented by the people in the house
  2. Ajiva (non-living matter): represented by the house itself
  3. Punya (results of good deeds): represented by the enjoyment of the cool breeze
  4. Papa (results of bad deeds): represented by the discomfort from the dust storm which brought dust into the house
  5. Asrava (influx of karmas): represented by the dust entering the house, similar to the influx of karmic particles into the soul
  6. Bandha (bondage of karmas): represented by the accumulation of dust in the house, which is similar to the bondage of karmic particles to the soul
  7. Samvara (stoppage of karmas): represented by closing the doors and windows to stop more dust from coming in, which is similar to the stoppage of the influx of karmic particles to the soul
  8. Nirjara (eradication of karmas): represented by cleaning the accumulated dust from the house, which is similar to shedding accumulated karmic particles from the soul
  9. Moksha (liberation): represented by the clean house, similar to shedding off all karmic particles from the soul
- 
1. Jiva: All living beings are called Jivas, having a consciousness known as the soul, which is also called the atma (soul: chetan). The soul and body are two different entities. The soul cannot be reproduced. It is described as a sort of energy which is indestructible, invisible, and shapeless. Jainism divides jivas into five categories ranging from one-sensed beings to five-sensed beings. The body is merely a home for the soul. At the time of death, the soul leaves the body to occupy a new one. Tirthankaras have said that the soul has an infinite capacity to know and perceive. This capacity of the soul is not experienced in its present state because of accumulated karmas.
  2. Ajiva: Anything that does not have a soul is called ajiva. Ajiva does not have consciousness. Jainism divides ajiva into five broad categories: dharmasti kaya (medium of motion), adharmasti kaya

(medium of rest), akashasti kaya (space), pudgalastikay (matter), and kala (time).

3. **Punya:** By undertaking wholesome activities, we acquire punya or good karmas. Some such activities are providing food or other items to needy people, doing charity work, propagating religion, etc. When punya matures, it brings forth comfort and happiness.
4. **Papa:** By undertaking bad activities, we incur papa or bad karmas. Some such activities are being cruel or violent, showing disrespect to parents or teachers, being angry or greedy and showing arrogance or indulging in deceit. When papa matures, it brings forth suffering, misery, and unhappiness.
5. **Asrava:** The influx of karmic particles to the soul is known as asrava. It is caused by wrong beliefs, vowlessness (observing no vows), passions, negligence, and psychophysical activities. Such an influx of karma is facilitated by mental, verbal, or physical activities.
6. **Samvara:** This is the process by which the influx of karmic particles is stopped. This is achieved by observing samiti (carefulness), gupti (control), ten-fold yati-dharma (Monkshood), and contemplating the twelve bhavanas (mental reflections), and parishaha (suffering).
7. **Bandha:** This refers to the actual binding of karmic particles to the soul. Bandha occurs when we react to any situation with a sense of attachment or aversion.
8. **Nirjara:** The process through which we shed karmas is called nirjara. Karmas can be shed either by passivity or active efforts. When we passively wait for karmas to mature and to give their results in due time, it is called Akam Nirjara. On the other side, if we put active efforts for karmas to mature earlier than supposed to be, it is called Sakam Nirjara. Sakam Nirjara can be achieved by performing penance, regretting, asking for forgiveness for the discomfort we might have caused to someone, or meditation, etc.
9. **Moksha:** If we rid ourselves of all karmas, we will attain moksha or liberation.

Bahiratman are the ignored souls, antaratman are the seekers and researchers, and paramatman are sacred souls who achieve spiritual enlightenment. When a person (referred to as 'bahiratman') receives the

right education, they develop into a good soul. Poverty is not a curse; education can uplift everyone. All living beings desire to live and avoid harm. By cultivating one's own character and leading an ethical, moral life, individuals harness the power of creation. Prayer is necessary to create positive energy, love, and universal compassion for humans, animals, and all living beings. Jainism emphasises that we must not unnecessarily destroy or harm the earth, water, air, sky, or fire and that we must respect all living beings, whether they possess one sense or five. Non-violence is considered supreme in Jainism.

There are notable similarities between Jainism and other world religions, such as Christianity, Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam, Sikhism, and the Baha'i faith. For instance, both Jainism and Christianity emphasise respect for universal brotherhood, ethical living, and prayer. Jainism's teachings on non-violence, ethical conduct, and the cyclical nature of time (Kalchakra) align with many of the values found in other religions.

### **Kalchakras**

Jains believe that time is infinite, with no beginning or end. Time is divided into infinite equal time cycles (Kalchakras). Each time cycle is further subdivided into two equal halves: the progressive cycle or ascending order, known as Utsarpini, and the regressive cycle or descending order, known as Avasarpini. Each Utsarpini and Avasarpini is divided into six unequal periods called Aras.

During the Utsarpini half cycle, aspects such as progress, development, happiness, strength, age, body, and religious trends improve, moving from the worst conditions to the best. Conversely, during the Avasarpini half cycle, these aspects deteriorate, moving from the best conditions to the worst. Currently, we are in the fifth Ara of the Avasarpini phase. When the Avasarpini phase ends, the Utsarpini phase begins. This cycle repeats infinitely.

The six aras are:

1. Sukham Sukham Kala (very good)
2. Sukham Kala (good)
3. Sukham Dukham Kala (good bad)
4. Dukham Sukham Kala (bad good)
5. Dukham Kala (bad)
6. Dukham Dukham Kala (very bad)

1. Sukham Sukham Kala: This is a time of absolute happiness. During this phase, people are very tall and live for a very long period of time. Children are born as twins, a boy and a girl. All the needs and desires of the people are fulfilled by ten different kinds of Kalpavriksha (wish-giving trees). The trees provide places to live, clothes, pots and pans, good food, fruits and sweets, harmonious music, jewellery, beautiful flowers, radiant lamps, and a bright light at night. There is no killing, crime, or vice.
2. Sukham Kala: This is the phase of happiness, but it is not absolute. The wish-giving trees still continue to provide for the people's needs, but the people are not as tall and do not live as long.
3. Sukham Dukham Kala: This is a phase consisting of more happiness than misery. During this period the kalpvrikshas do not consistently provide what is desired. Towards the end of this period in the current time cycle, Rishabhadeva became the first Tirthankar. He realized that things were going to get worse. So, he taught the people useful arts including, sewing, farming, and cooking, which would enable them to depend upon themselves. He also introduced a political system and became the first king. This era came to an end three years and eight months after the nirvana of Rishabhadeva. The first Chakravarti Bharat, Bahubali, also known for his strength, and Brahmi, who devised eighteen different alphabets were Rishabhadeva's children.
4. Dukham Sukham Kala: This is a phase of more misery, sorrow, and suffering than happiness. The other twenty-three Tirthankaras and eleven Chakravarties were born during this era which came to an end three years and eight months after Lord Mahavir's nirvana.
5. Dukham Kala: This era is currently prevailing. It is an era of unhappiness which began a little over 2,549 years ago and will last for a total of 21,000 years. No one born during this period will gain salvation in their present life, because no one will observe true religion. It is said that by the end of this era, the Jain religion will be lost.
6. Dukham Dukham Kala: This is a time of absolute misery and unhappiness. During this time people will experience nothing but suffering. There will be no trace of religious activities. The life spans of people will be very short, exceeding no more than twenty years.



Most people will be non-vegetarian and the social structure will be destroyed. The weather will become extreme, the days will be very hot, and the nights will be very cold. At the end of this Ara, period of Utsarpini will start and the time wheel will take an upward swing. There will be days of rain which will provide nourishment so that seeds can once again grow. Miseries will diminish and happiness will increase until absolute happiness is once again reached.

There should be an emphasis on the importance of religious unity and the need to educate people globally about adopting vegetarian food habits to minimise violence in the name of food. Global warming and climate change are exacerbated by unnecessary machine use and deforestation. Good education can address issues like racial, linguistic, and socio-economic differences, as well as caste, creed, and political conflicts that disrupt global relationships. Tolerance, understanding, and respect are crucial for helping each other. Religious leaders play a vital role in promoting harmony, and not blaming each other in the name of religion. Religious leaders should advise political leaders and global issues need a unified approach. We should urge unity and global peace, and emphasise that the world does not need weapons or nuclear bombs, but true religious principles (dharma) to achieve global peace.

### **Bhavanas**

Bhavanas are reflections or contemplations. We are always thinking of something or another which may be near us or could even be as far away as the other end of the world. This thinking may cause happiness, sorrow, anger, greed, jealousy, egoism, etc. Depending upon how we react we attract various types of karmas to our souls. No prudent person would like to attract bad karma and at certain stages any karma at all. But it is not as easy as turning off a light switch. To minimise the bondage of karmas, the Jina have taught us to observe sixteen Bhavanas. Of them, the following four can easily be practiced by householders while the rest may be observed once we become more serious about spiritual uplift.

1. Maitri Bhavana (thinking of being a friend): cultivating a sense of friendship towards all beings
2. Pramoda Bhavana (thinking of appreciation): appreciating the virtues and achievements of others
3. Karuna Bhavana (thinking of compassion): developing compassion for those who are suffering

4. Madhyastha Bhavana (thinking of staying neutral or uninvolved): maintaining neutrality and non-involvement in the face of conflicting situations

Let us understand how these bhavanas play important roles in our lives, how they can keep us away from bad karmas, and ultimately how they can improve our overall chances to uplift our souls.

1. Maitri Bhavana (thinking of friendship): Lord Mahavira said that we must be a friend to all living beings. The feeling of friendship brings love and respect for others. It also initiates a feeling of brotherhood among all and in turn leaves no room for harm, deceit or quarrelsomeness with anybody. If we contemplate on Maitri Bhavana our thoughts, words, and actions will not be harsh and we will not hurt anybody. On the contrary, we will support and protect everybody. Friendship will lead us to be tolerant, forgiving and caring for one another. It can be seen that if we develop a friendship with all living beings, we will avoid bad karma.
2. Pramoda Bhavana (thinking of appreciation): In this bhavana, we admire the success of our friends, spiritual leaders, and Arihants. One of the most destructive forces in our lives is jealousy. However, friendship combined with admiration, destroys jealousy. As jealousy subsides, negative impulses are turned into positive ones, and in time you will be at peace.
3. Karuna Bhavana (thinking of compassion): Instead of succeeding, many of our friends may be getting into trouble for things they should not be doing and even those who are successful may be accumulating vices such as greed and ego. If such is the case then, they are not on the right path and may be weak, helpless, and in distress. At a time like this, you should contemplate on the Karuna Bhavana and show compassion towards them instead of being disgusted towards them or hating them. Show them the right path with patience, tolerance, and forgiveness and offer them needed support. In this way not only will you be avoiding bad karma, but so will your friends.
4. Madhyastha Bhavana (think of staying neutral or uninvolved): Life appears to be nothing but involvements. Sometimes life works out favourably and sometimes it does not. So instead of getting disappointed, angry, or more involved, you should contemplate on

Madhyastha Bhavana which leads to feeling that I did my best to resolve the situation. If someone does not want to understand, then leave them alone without getting further involved. You should simply hope that one of these days they may understand and change. By observing Madhyastha Bhavana you will remain in equanimity instead of provoking turmoil in your mind. When your mind stays neutral and uninvolved it keeps karma away.

In short, you can avoid the influx of bad karma and stay in peace while living in worldly life by developing a friendship towards all living beings, admiring their success, holding their hands when they are in distress, and leaving them alone at times when they do not understand what is right or wrong. So, until it becomes the natural way of life to observe the above bhavanas, one should meditate on them as many times as needed. If there is a goal, then there is an achievement!

## Thematic Presentation - VIII

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### ***Sub-Theme II:*** **Interfaith Perspectives on Renewal and Restoration of Creation:**

### **Hindu Perspective on Dwelling in Harmony**

**Swami Narasimhananda**  
*Ramakrishna Mission, India*

My greetings to all the dignitaries who are present, and also to all of you who have come here, including the bishops and all the other members of the Christian Conference of Asia. I now request you to repeat after me a word that is quite popular as a greeting in Sanskrit: “Namaste”. Once more, “Namaste”. This word, as most of you might be aware, means “Namahathe”, which translates to “I salute the Divinity within you”.

I believe this captures the fundamental wisdom of all faith traditions across the world. The more we move away from this source of wisdom, the more we cause confusion and disharmony in the world, in the environment, in societies, and among all nations. Today, we are witnessing a critical period in human history where, knowingly or unknowingly, we are moving towards polarisation. Every religion claims to be the best, every nation emphasises its uniqueness, and every linguistic group asserts its superiority. This backdrop causes much deviation from what our founding fathers or prophets of world religions taught us.

I thank the Christian Conference of Asia for organising this wonderful event. The theme, “God, Renew Us in Your Spirit and Restore the Creation,” aligns with the teachings of Sanatan Dharma, also known as Hinduism, which emphasises renewing one’s spirit and restoring creation. When we align with our true selves and recognise that we are part of the Divine, we eliminate disharmony.

A Hindu saying emphasises that considering something as the ‘other’ and positing duality leads to fear. This concept applies not only to fear but also to human emotions like love, hatred, and jealousy. The more I distance myself from others, the more I cause disharmony. We must understand this today. Another wonderful idea in Hinduism is that everything we see and perceive is God. This includes not only living beings but also inanimate objects like this microphone and the walls. Recognizing this,

there is no reason to find differences or segregation, which leads to a worse planet for future generations.

I am reminded of a prayer in Hinduism called the Shanti Mantra. Shanti means peace, and these prayers seek peace at three levels: individual, other living beings, and natural elements like tornadoes and cyclones. One such Shanti Mantra says, “Let there be sweetness in the air, let all the water of this world be sweet, let all the herbs of this universe be sweet and useful to us, let both day and night be sweet for us, let the soil of the earth be sweet and beneficial for us, let the Father in heaven be kind and merciful to us, let all vegetation be sweet and nourishing.” This prayer seeks harmony with the entire creation, emphasising that we must be in harmony with nature.

Most of us suffer from anxiety because we confuse our needs with our wants. The Yoga Sutras of India teach that nature will fulfil our genuine needs. Problems arise when our needs are overshadowed by excessive wants, leading to disharmony.

Another peace prayer in the Vedas emphasises the cyclical nature of things and prays for peace and welfare among human beings, vegetation, and all living beings. This comprehensive prayer highlights the wisdom of seeing everything in harmony, as there is essentially no difference between one being and another.

I recall an incident from the life of Sri Sarada Devi, the consort of Sri Ramakrishna, who taught that divinity pervades everything, including inanimate objects like a broom. This lesson reminds us to handle all aspects of life with the consciousness that God exists everywhere.

In Hinduism, a person is required to perform five kinds of services: worship of gods and goddesses, meditation on the ultimate reality, worship of ancestors, serving other human beings by providing food, shelter, clothing, and knowledge, and imparting spiritual knowledge. Most of you are interested in spreading the word of God, faith, and religion. Today’s crisis is not about which religion is great but whether people should be religious or not. We witness a movement called “spiritual but not religious”, where people seek spirituality without religiosity.

To counter this, we need to acknowledge divinity in every being, seeing God in every person, animal, and plant. The fifth type of service, serving living beings, includes practices like making diagrams with rice powder

(called kolam or rangoli) for ants and other living beings to feed on, symbolizing daily routines that help all aspects of society.

Today, we face two major problems: ecological imbalance and the disillusionment of youth. Many young people fall victim to substance abuse and addictions. To tackle these issues, we must engage youth with nature constructively. An example is Elon Musk, who, despite not sharing a spiritual worldview, is obsessed with creating a better tomorrow and finding ecological balance.

If youth engage with nature in a way that makes sense to them, we can conserve the environment more effectively. Religious leaders should focus on removing suffering and providing spiritual solutions rather than emphasising dogmas and doctrines. Conferences like this one will become fruitful, encouraging more people to engage with nature, leading to a better planet for future generations.

I thank the Christian Conference of Asia for inviting me here and thank all of you for your patient hearing. Namaste.

## Thematic Presentation - IX

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### *Sub-Theme III:*

### **Renewal and Restoration of Creation: Attaining Life in Its Fullness**

**Rev. Prof. Dr Vicky Balabanski**  
*Flinders University, Australia*

John's Gospel is a Gospel about life. Life is at the very opening of the Gospel: in chapter 1 verse 4 we read '...in him was life, and the life was the light of all people.' Life is at the close of chapter 20, setting out the purpose of John's Gospel: '...these things are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name. (Jn. 20:31). Within that frame, life is referred to very frequently – as many as the other three Gospels put together.<sup>1</sup> John's Gospel is a Gospel about life – abundant life, eternal life, life conveyed by the One who is the bread of life, the Way, the Truth and the Life, and who lays down his life that he may take it up again.

Creation is the means whereby life is revealed in this Gospel – where we experience life through our senses. This is a Gospel rich with bread and wine and light and water, a wedding celebration and festivals and funeral rites and fragrant anointing. This Gospel is about the Word who is known in and through the material world, in and through the flesh. So, when the Gospel of John speaks of eternal life, this is not a disembodied future reality, but is already here and now in this creation. Eternal life is now – reaching far back into the past and on into the future. Eternal life is experienced within the vast framework of God's activity, and in the embrace of God who loves the world and chooses relationship with us. We participate in eternal life here and now, and we do so embedded in creation. Creation is the material and spiritual imprint of the Creator. The embodied, tangible world is where we experience God's ultimate self-revelation; where we experience this Life.

Creation is not just the place where life is revealed: it's also the bridge for the believer to move from surface perception to depth perception, from unbelief to belief. The senses are very important in this Gospel, not

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<sup>1</sup> This includes two additional terms -- ζωοποιέω in Jn 5:21 and 6:63 and the synonym ψυχή in 10:15,17, 12:25, 13:37, 38, 15:13. If one includes the verbal forms of life, the ratio in John's Gospel to the other Gospels is much higher.



only sight and hearing, but also touch, taste, and smell.<sup>2</sup> Only through the senses can the human imagination come to perceive more than just the ordinary significance of things such as bread, wine, light, and water. Creation is necessary to comprehend both the ordinary and the deeper revelatory significance of such things.

In Jn 10:10, Jesus the Good Shepherd says: 'I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.' The word for abundant, *perissos*, is rich in meaning. *Perissos* means extraordinary, remarkable, bountiful life, extravagant and overflowing life. What picture do these words evoke in you? Take a moment to imagine what extraordinary, remarkable abundant life looks like for you.

Perhaps it forms a picture in your mind's eye of a beautiful place with swaying palm trees and aquamarine water? Or maybe your abundant life looks more like a celebration at home with family and friends, with a delicious banquet and music and laughter? Or maybe you imagine a fresh and untouched ecosystem filled with flowers and rich with birdlife?

Abundant life is something we all desire, people of faith and people of no faith, where there is peace and harmony and plenty, where our senses are filled with the good things that life can offer.

It's also where people of faith and people of no faith are vulnerable. There are many voices that claim to offer a path to an experience of abundant life. The advertising industry takes this good and godly desire and shapes it into the need to consume abundantly. Let me say this again: our good and godly desire for abundant life is constantly being mistaken for the desire for abundant consumption. I am speaking now as someone from Australia, a country that consumes more fossil fuel per person than virtually any other population in the world.<sup>3</sup> Per person, I consume more than 8 times the amount of fossil fuel that you do, my brothers and sisters. Abundant life, understood as a lifestyle based on consumerism, is killing the abundant life of our planet. And I am complicit.

God created life to be abundant. In the creation story in Genesis 2, the Garden of Eden likely means the Garden of "luxury, abundance, delight, or lushness."<sup>4</sup> It is a garden of trees that are not only good for food, but delightful to the senses, and at the centre is the Tree of Life. The Garden of Eden is a picture of abundant life.

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<sup>2</sup> Dorothy A. Lee, *Hallowed in Truth and Love: Spirituality in the Johannine Literature* (Preston: Mosaic Press, 2011), 167–198.

<sup>3</sup> Fossil fuel consumption per capita, 2022 ([ourworldindata.org](http://ourworldindata.org))

<sup>4</sup> The West Semitic stem *ʿdn* occurs in several languages, and indicates "luxury, abundance, delight, or lushness." Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary entry EDEN, GARDEN OF (PLACE), Etymology.

At the other end of our Scriptures in Revelation 22 we meet the Tree of Life again, in another vision of abundant life. But now it's in a city setting. There the trees produce abundantly, twelve kinds of fruit each month, and their leaves are for the healing of the nations. Here we have an urban Eden – a vision of lush abundance, but now in a city. In this vision of a world restored, we meet God and the Lamb renewing the same abundant life that Adam, the Earth creature, was originally told to serve and protect (Gen. 2:15). Again we see a frame around the Scriptures that helps us notice the connection between creation in Genesis and new creation in Revelation – and of course both of them are characterized by abundant life.

What has happened, though, is that humanity has taken that desire for abundant life and worshipped the creature rather than the Creator – worshipped the abundant life rather than the One from whom that abundant life comes. In a subtle but profound perversion of the good gifts of God, our desire for abundant life has become all about taking control of that abundance – of accumulating it for ourselves, our families, our communities and our own nations.

So, what do we as people who follow the Way, the Truth and the Life have to say about the hijacking of abundant life by consumerism?

I want to offer three ideas which we, as Christian leaders, may draw on to help our communities recognize what the nature of Jesus's abundant life really is. First, I will say something more about the context of John 10, which is the setting for this saying about abundant life. Second, I want to draw on some thoughts from the Christian philosopher James K.A. Smith about the way our desire for abundant life has been hijacked and reshaped. Third and finally, I will return to John's Gospel, noting the themes of gardening in John 15 John 20, and the way in which they connect with Eden to invite further reflection. I will then offer a practical response that arises from these points.

So first, to John 10. As you know, this is a chapter about Jesus as the Good Shepherd (ὁ ποιμὴν ὁ καλός). Some scholars suggest that this should be translated as the Noble Shepherd, who prioritizes the needs of the flock even to the extent of laying down his life.<sup>5</sup> This is indeed a chapter about self-giving love – giving one's life away. The thieves and bandits and hired workers are not motivated by self-giving, but by self-interest. So when

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<sup>5</sup> Jerome H. Neyrey SJ, 'The Noble Shepherd in John 10: Cultural and Rhetorical Background', in *JBL* 120/2 (2001), 267-291.

we reflect on the meaning of Jn 10:10—the meaning of abundant life – we need to set it in the context of the Shepherd who does not grasp that abundance for his own interests, but offers it generously and gently for the wellbeing of the flock. The distortion of abundant life to being all about us belongs to the thieves and bandits and hired workers. They symbolize the forces of consumerism today.

We know through this Gospel that even Peter slips into the role of the hired hand who serves his own ends; in chapter 21 Peter needs to be restored to the model of the Good and Noble Shepherd, who feeds the lambs and tends the sheep (Jn 21:15-19). We too as followers of Christ need to perceive abundant life from this perspective too. The abundance of life must flow to the lambs of Jesus' many flocks. It must feed and tend the little ones. Only in this way will we be Christ-like leaders who are formed in the likeness of the Good and Noble Shepherd.

Second, I want to draw your attention to the shaping of our desire for abundant life. As Psalm 37:4 says: 'Delight yourself in the Lord, and he will give you the desires of your heart.' The work of James K. A. Smith explores how the desires of our hearts are shaped, in his book *Desiring the Kingdom*.<sup>6</sup> Smith writes:

Because our hearts are oriented primarily by desire, by what we love, and because those desires are shaped and molded by the habit-forming practices in which we participate, it is the rituals and practices of the [shopping] mall – the liturgies [and habits] of mall and market—that shape our imaginations and how we orient ourselves to the world...the visions of the god life embedded in these practices become surreptitiously embedded in us through our participation...and are in effect an education of desire...<sup>7</sup>

Smith is writing from a North American context when he names the shopping mall and the market as the drivers of consumerism. But I think we can all hear how that resonates with our own contexts. How are we all being subtly shaped by market forces in our own contexts towards a so-called 'good life' of consumerism? Smith rightly argues that we are what we love. If what we love is shaped by a culture of increasing abundance *for our own ends*, how can we form people towards an abundant life that lays down our own self-interest? Smith argues that we need to form habits and practices that shape our desires, and that this formation takes place through worship and through education.

<sup>6</sup> James K. A. Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom: Worship, Worldview and Cultural Formation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2009) and *You are What you love: The Spiritual Power of Habit* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Publishing House, 2016).

<sup>7</sup> James K. A. Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom*, 25.

This is a bigger discussion than we can tackle today. But I want to put it to you that as Christian leaders, our endeavour must be to allow our own desire and the desire of our communities to be shaped towards the abundant, shared life of God, rather than towards the market-driven illusion of ‘the *good life*’ of abundant possessions. We can help shape desire towards ecological virtues and practices, by our teaching, by our worship leading, and by our example. The guiding vision is of Eden renewed, with the abundance of life in an urban setting, the healing of the nations and the presence of God in our midst.

My third and final point returns to the Gospel of John. In John 15:1, we learn that God the Father is ὁ γεωργός, which means the ‘farmer’. Jesus is not only the Vine, but the Son of the Farmer, the One who tends the vineyard or garden. So when we come to John 20, we hear something that reminds us of this insight-- the moment when Mary encounters the Risen Christ. Let me read out this significant moment:

15 “Woman,” he said, “why are you crying? Who are you looking for?” She thought he was *the gardener*. So she said, “Sir, did you carry him away? Tell me where you put him. Then I will go and get him.”

16 Jesus said to her, “Mary.” (Jn 20:15-16)

Mary Magdalene takes Jesus to be a gardener.<sup>8</sup> In this Gospel, nothing is superfluous. Often there is a deep irony and symbolism, where chance comments mean more than the speaker realizes.<sup>9</sup> Here we can notice that Mary has glimpsed something that is truer than she realized: Jesus is indeed a gardener. Jesus is the true Adam, who genuinely cares for the

<sup>8</sup> See Mary Daly Denton, *John: An Earth Bible Commentary. Supposing Him to be the Gardener* (London: Bloomsbury T & T Clark, 2017), 13-14.

<sup>9</sup> When one begins to look for Johannine irony, it proves to be widespread. See for example Jn. 7:35: “Where does this man intend to go that we will not find him? Does he intend to go to the Dispersion among the Greeks and teach the Greeks?” This is truer that the interlocutors know, as Jesus’ ultimate mission is to the world, not just Israel. Another example is in Jn 11:50-52, when Caiaphas states: ‘You do not understand that it is better for you to have one man die for the people than to have the whole nation destroyed.’ He did not say this on his own, but being high priest that year he prophesied that Jesus was about to die for the nation, and not for the nation only, but to gather into one the dispersed children of God.’ Caiaphas speaks more truly than he knows. Here we see the layers of meaning embedded in the Johannine narrative. The Passion narrative is particularly rich with irony. Studies of Johannine irony include Paul D. Duke, *Irony in the Fourth Gospel* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1985); R. Alan Culpepper, “Reading Johannine Irony,” in *Exploring the Gospel of John: In Honor of D. Moody Smith* (eds. R. Alan Culpepper and C. Clifton Black: Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1996), Klaus Scholtissek, “Ironie und Rollenwechsel im Johannesevangelium,” *ZNW* 89 (1998) and Saeed Hamid- Khani, *Revelation and Concealment of Christ: A Theological Inquiry into the Elusive Language of the Fourth Gospel* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2000), 75-78.

garden and genuinely fulfils the call to serve and protect the Garden. Jesus is both the Teacher, the Lord -- and also the Gardener. Here we have a further echo of Eden. We can read Jn 20 together with Genesis 2 and Revelation 22, seeing Eden not only at the beginning and end of the Scriptures, but at the heart of them as well. If we are already participating in eternal life here and now, we can already be investing in the abundant life of the renewed Earth described in Revelation 22.

As we reflect on Eden renewed and restored, I want to play a clip of an urban farm started in 2018 on a degraded vacant lot. Let's have a look: <https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=Uukzc-Br6ak><sup>10</sup>

This Organic Market Garden farm began as an empty lot in 2018. An organisation called *For The Love of Bees* turned this land into a high yield urban farm by using no-till, regenerative organic growing methods. They now grow enough food to feed over 30 families a week on just 450sqm of planted land - that's less space than a basketball court. Urban farms deliver 10 climate-change-ready values: biodiversity, water retention, drawing down carbon from the atmosphere, heat sinking, air filtration, reducing food mileage and adding to food & nutrition security, providing 21<sup>st</sup> century jobs, social cohesion and optimism.

In Asia we already have a Life-giving Agriculture movement, headed by Rev. Han Kyeong Ho from South Korea,<sup>11</sup> and guided in India by Rev. Dr Daniel Premkumar. Both these leaders are examples of Christians re-reading and interpreting the Bible in solidarity with rural communities. They are responding to the need to shape a better future for the world, particularly for the vulnerable and marginalized.

I want to suggest that this is a profoundly spiritual vision. Why can't people of faith be a sign and foretaste of the urban Eden to come, by hosting high yield urban farming on areas around our churches? When Mary Magdalene took Jesus to be a gardener, her vision was blurred by weeping. Nevertheless, she has glimpsed something that is truer than she realized: Jesus is indeed a gardener-- the true Adam. In his embodied presence, Jesus reveals God as both Creator and re-Creator. My prayer is that the Church may be known for its willingness to live life abundantly, sacrificially and for the good of all.

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<sup>10</sup> OMG Urban Farm — For The Love of Bees

<sup>11</sup> See his chapter on Nong theology and practice in 'A Theological Reflection on the Crisis of Urban Industrial Civilization and of Nong (a concept of everything about agriculture)', in the *6<sup>th</sup> Asian Christian life-Giving Agriculture Forum*, 21-25 November 2022, University of the Philippines, Los Ba os, Luguna (2023) 136-150, and Rev Dr R Daniel Premkumar, *Earth is the Lord's: Reflections on Bible and Sustainable Agriculture* (Royapettah, Chennai: Mighty Rock Printers, 2023).

## **Thematic Presentation - X**

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### ***Sub-Theme III:***

## **Renewal and Restoration of Creation: Attaining Life in Its Fullness An Eco-Public Theological Engagement on Life**

**Rev. Dr Raj Bharat Patta**

*Andhra Evangelical Lutheran Church, India*

Many years ago, I noticed a caption of a cancer hospital in Bangalore, which read, “Adding life to years.” Such a subtext was to inform the public sphere that at their cancer hospital, through their medical treatment and care they want to ensure and assure people that they are in the mission of adding life to years, however short it can be or however prolonged it can be. What do they mean by adding life to years? I assume that the medical teams over there are striving to offer hope, healing, health, care and love to people who visit their hospital for treatments. However, the whole concept of life is deeper and wider, for life is to add meaning to every breath of the living organism that inhales and exhales, by living it with love and peace. In the context of renewal and restoration of creation, attaining life in all its fullness is to celebrate and affirm love among all creatures of life, where newness, mercy, hope, compassion and justice will flourish among all of the creation. To attain that, one has to constantly work together with all the species of the creation for the transformation of the creation.

Unfortunately, today when we think of life, our human worldview tends to think of life as only human life, with minimal consideration of the other life forms in our views, perspectives and practices. Life is not a possession or monopoly of mere human beings. Perhaps it is time we move into an ecological earth view to recognise and celebrate life in all creatures and in all forms.

Greta Thunberg, a 15-year-old girl caught the attention of the world when she boldly shamed climate change negotiators at the COP24 UN Climate Summit in Poland by saying, “You are not mature enough.” In her speech, she said, “You say you love your children, but you are stealing their future in front of their *very eyes*...Until you start focusing on what needs to be

done rather than what is politically possible, there is no hope. We cannot solve a crisis without treating it as a crisis.”<sup>1</sup> She has also called for a global school walkout to speak to the adults about the climate crisis that our planet is facing today. Thunberg’s passion, courage and forthright talk on climate justice reminds us that prophets and prophecies come from the margins, like from children and teenagers, for she is concerned with life, life in its fullness. Those who have ears and hearts will listen to such prophets like Thunberg’s call and act on it to save life and to live a life in fullness in the ecology of God.

In this reflection, I shall first discuss the context of life today, which has been pre-dominantly human-centric, which I shall explain as Anthropocene. I shall then explain the impact of the Anthropocene as de-ecologisation under three markers; un-creatureliness, un-creation, un-creativity. Then I shall discuss in order for life to flourish in all its fullness, the creatures are called to turn to other creatures in the creation. In that process, I will explain the turn to the soil and plants, with a special reference to Jesus’ parable of the mustard seed. In conclusion, I echo five theological principles in attaining life in all its fullness in the ecology of God.

### **Life Context: Anthropocene**

The planet Earth has now entered a new epoch, which Nobel laureate J. Crutzen calls it ‘Anthropocene’ where human beings have become a dominant planetary force. In other words, human beings have now taken over not only the top hierarchical position of the created beings but also a central position, pushing the rest of the creatures to the margins. The domination of the powerful human beings which include white, rich, dominant caste, men tends to define the markers of life, with no concern for the natural habitations on the planet and with no sensitivity to the relationality of human beings with the flora and fauna of the creation. The economies and technologies developed by human beings now affect the life of the creation from the micro to macro levels. Such ‘human developments’ have enveloped the habitations of the life of different species, making the dominant human beings the reason for the degradation and damage of the world today. Bringhurst describes this Anthropocene epoch as the time of human rejection of the wild, which Wirzaba describes as a refusal to trust nature to take care of itself and its creatures as well. Bringhurst says, “The wild is the only place to go to calibrate your mind. There really is no other place...because it is what

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.lifegate.com/greta-thunberg-speech-cop24>



your mind was born from”<sup>2</sup> Perhaps the lack of wildlife and plant life in the hierarchical worldview of human beings not only puts natural life at risk, with so many species facing extinction but also is putting human life at greater risk, for it will one day make human beings extinct, wiped out as a species from the face of the earth.

## Life Uprooted: De-ecologisation

One of the adverse effects of the onset of the Anthropocene, where human beings dominate the rest of the creation today is what I call de-ecologisation of life on our planet. Allow me to unpack what this de-ecologisation of life means today. Ecology, economy and ecodomy (meaning ‘building the house of life’ and ‘the art of inhabiting instead of dominating the earth our house’)<sup>3</sup> all share the word *oikos*, which means the household, where life exists in collective, communal, relational and respective dimensions among all creatures of the creation. The vision and mission of the divine in the Biblical creation narratives are basically an ecological vision and an ecodomical practice. Ecologisation of life means celebrating the gift of love in the inter-connectedness of life, interdependence of life and interaction of life among all creatures in the ecology of the divine as manifested in the creation of God. Ecologisation of life is non-hierarchical, unthreatening, and affirms the kith and kin relationship among all creatures. Ecologisation in the context of agrarian farming is defined as, “the growing importance of environmental issues within agricultural policies and practices.”<sup>4</sup> Therefore, de-ecologisation is de-sensitivity on the part of human beings to the importance of environmental issues within life policies, practices, faiths and spiritualities.

With humanity’s colonisation of the rest of the creation, human beings crowned themselves to take dominion (applying hermeneutics of convenience to suit humanity to be powerful among the creation) over the creation, turned away from the ecological vision of the divine and

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<sup>2</sup> Robert Bringham and Jan Zwicky, *Learning to Die: Wisdom in the Age of Climate Crisis* (Regina: University of Regina Press, 2018). P. 8-9 as quoted by Norman Wirzba, *This Sacred Life: Humanity’s Place in a Wounded World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021). P. 26

<sup>3</sup> Barbara Rossing, R and Johan Buitendag, “Life in Its Fullness: Ecology, Eschatology and Ecodomy in a Time of Climate Change,” *HTS Teologiese Studies / Theological Studies* 76, no. 1 (2020), <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v76i1.6245>.

<sup>4</sup> Éléonore Schnebelin, Pierre Labarthe, and Jean-Marc Touzard, “How Digitalisation Interacts with Ecologisation? Perspectives from Actors of the French Agricultural Innovation System,” *Journal of Rural Studies* 86, no. 2 (2021): 599–610, <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jrurstud.2021.07.023>.

de-ecologised life to quench their greed by exploiting creation to meet their needs of limitless profits. The impacts of de-ecologisation include the growing loss of biodiversity; the natural resource of water no longer is natural, for the waters are controlled by the corporates through the commercialisation of water today; rapid increase of deforestation, affecting the plant life and wildlife; and land becoming more a real estate issue, clouding or even erasing the sanctity and sacredness of land.

It is also important to note that de-humanisation of the vulnerable and powerless communities, whose life and livelihood is on land, water and soil also accentuates the furtherance of de-ecologising the life of the creation. George Zachariah explains the impact of eco-castesim in the context of the vulnerable Dalits in India and explains how Dalits contest the notions of *oikos* as universal home for all. He writes, "Such problematizations are contested by the subaltern communities because accusing all human beings for the ecological crisis is a political strategy to perpetuate ecological injustice and ecological racism and casteism by absolving the ecological crimes of the dominant and the privileged communities and corporations."<sup>5</sup> So, an eco-public theological vision is rooted in the lives of those that have been de-humanised and so a conversation of de-ecologisation grounds its *logos* from the perspectives of the indigenous, tribal, Adivasi and Dalits. Among many markers of de-ecologisation, allow me to share three markers that are relevant to our eco-public theological visions of life. Un-creatureliness, Un-creation, and Un-creativity explain de-ecologisation of life in our times, places and spaces.

#### i. Un-creatureliness

Firstly, un-creatureliness is humanity's 'othering' the rest of the creation, with convenient amnesia of acknowledging that we human beings ourselves are also the creatures in the creation of God. The advent of the transhuman and post-human endeavours and the negative shades of the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) are cases in point to explain how human beings consider their superiority and dominance over the creatures in the creation, for Anthropocene considers and values life in data and algorithms. Perhaps un-creatureliness is *un-ubuntu*, which I translate as "I am because of what I am" in contrast to "I am because we are." Creatures can be understood only in their relationships with

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<sup>5</sup> George Zachariah, "Whose Oikos Is It Anyway? Towards a Poromboke Ecotheology of 'Commoning,'" in *Decolonizing Ecotheology*, ed. S. Lily Mendoza and George Zachariah (Eugene: Pickwick Publications, 2022). P.205

each other. Wirzba in discussing radicalizing humanity explains that life is growing together, and nothing can grow alone or on its own. For he says, “the *being* of a creature presupposes *being-with* others, which in turn, presupposes *becoming-with* them.”<sup>6</sup> De-ecologisation thrives on un-creatureliness, which is basically to make life highly individualistic and self-(in)sufficient. Wirzba further observes, “When people refuse their creatureliness and assume they must secure life for themselves, they will become destructive, whether out of arrogance, insecurity, or fear and create worlds that damage the creatures that live in them. The rejection of creatureliness casts a long shadow, one that we can see in war zones, toxic dumps, abandoned neighbourhoods, food deserts/swamps, mining extraction zones, denuded farm fields, poisoned waterways, mega-slums, refugee camps, and incarceration facilities.”<sup>7</sup> Un-creatureliness is disastrously dangerous for life to flourish, it needs an immediate call to turn to the creator by saving the creation.

Wirzba recalls that the Greek term for a person is *prosopon*. The preposition *pros* means “toward,” while the noun *ops/opos* means “eye,” “face,” or “countenance.” A person, therefore is a face turned to another.”<sup>8</sup> In the context of ecologisation, the calling for a person to be a person is to turn to another creature which is a human or a plant, or land, or an animal. However, de-ecologisation is a result of a person not living as a person for he/she/they/them do not turn to another creature in love and care, rather the effects are felt in the kind of ecological imbalances we face today.

## ii. Un-creation

Secondly, when discussing un-creation, Joseph Blenkinsopp describes the act of un-creation as a return to the chaos<sup>9</sup>. De-ecologisation brings in that chaos to the created order, chaos to the life systems, chaos to the lives of the creatures in the ecology of God through the insensitivity of human beings to the needs of the creation and through our greed of accumulating for ourselves. What we see in de-ecologisation is un-creation, where alienation exemplifies the kind of relationship the creatures exhibit to one another, where human beings are alienated from

<sup>6</sup> Wirzba, *This Sacred Life: Humanity's Place in a Wounded World*. P.179

<sup>7</sup> Wirzba. P. 194

<sup>8</sup> Wirzba. P. 174

<sup>9</sup> Joseph Blenkinsopp, *Creation, Un-Creation, Re-Creation: A Discursive Commentary on Genesis 1-11* (New York: T & T Clarke, 2011). P. 144

God the creator, human beings are alienated from human beings, and human beings are alienated from soil, land, flora, fauna, and animals. When God created their creation in and through Christ, Wirzba explains that Jesus reveals that the heart of creaturely life is itself animated by the powers of love and care.<sup>10</sup> With un-creation, creaturely life loses those powers of love and care for the creation and hatred, exploitation and violence take precedence in life, lives and life systems. In a way, un-creation uproots life from the face of the creation.

Every creature created by God is an embodiment of the divine delight, for each creature is unique, mysterious and precious. Un-creation, as a marker of de-ecologisation therefore is a denial of the Creator's creativity who created the creatures with utmost care on one hand and also to deny the mysteriousness of creatures in the creation. Un-creation subscribes to the notions of homogenisation of all creatures, and those that are powerful creatures, in this case powerful human beings, and seeks to homogenise creation by colonising her with no concern to affirm inclusion and diversity of the creation.

### iii. **Un-creativity**

Thirdly, to understand un-creativity, we need to engage with creativity. The primary task given by the Creator God to *Adamah* was to till and keep the land (Gen. 2:9), which was basically an invitation to work alongside and work with the divine in the garden of Eden. This commissioning of God to human beings was when the strokes of creativity were offered to human beings to continue the creativity of God. Therefore, un-creativity is a direction to un-till and un-keep the garden of God, with self-sufficiency, and self-fullness being the hallmarks of human beings.

Wirzba in explaining about rethinking creativity observes, "People do not exist apart from their places but grow out of them. They are not self-standing or self-organising agents, which is why any account of creativity as self-expression is inadequate. Their lives are symbiogenetic, always *co-becoming with others*, which means that their doing and their agency are also an undergoing in which they respond to a dynamic, given world that is working itself out on and in them."<sup>11</sup> In light of this observation, un-creation of the Anthropocene has become a self-expression of ourselves, unaffected by the creativity of the species around us, and by making creativity a monopoly of human beings alone, with no sense of being with others or becoming with others.

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<sup>10</sup> Wirzba, *This Sacred Life: Humanity's Place in a Wounded World*. P.174

<sup>11</sup> Wirzba. P.227

Creativity is also understood to be a continuous flow of life, where there is mutual reception and mutual gratitude to one another. Un-creativity is causing a discontinuity in the flow of life, where human beings have always been on the side of receiving from the creation with a little sense of mutual offering back and being grateful to the creation. Tim Ingold explains that “a creativity that is inherent in the flow of life...is continuous rather than punctual.”<sup>12</sup> Un-creativity is punctual, temporal, and discontinuous to the flow of life, feeling self-satisfied for the good of the self of human beings alone.

Un-creativity is also expressed in un-limitedness of human greed. What Anthropocene and de-ecologisation have made the powerful and dominant, namely human beings, live without limits, following and falling into the ‘progress traps’ with no concern for the impacts on ecology and environment today. Perhaps engaging in resistance and resilience to the un-limitedness of human beings’ desire and greed for more in life<sup>13</sup> is a way out in addressing de-ecologisation.

Having discussed the uprootedness of life today in the context of Anthropocene with its effects of de-ecologisation as un-creatureliness, un-creation and un-creativity, let us look to a rooted life in the creation and turn to the other creatures in the creation to affirm life, and affirm it in all fullness.

### **Sprouting Life: Turning Towards Co-Creatures**

In our wounded, de-ecologised Anthropocene planet, if life has to be affirmed it calls for a *metanoia* of human beings, and invites us to be ecological beings, where we are invited to turn to our co-creatures, for they provide the conditions for life, and full lives to flourish. Jesus as the chief shepherd speaks about ‘life in all its fullness’ (John 10:10) in contrast to a thief shepherd who comes to steal, destroy and kill the sheep. Perhaps ‘life in all its fullness’ which Jesus spoke comes alive to us in the context of de-ecologisation caused by the Anthropocene which has been stealing, destroying and even killing life and lives in the context of climate catastrophe today.

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<sup>12</sup> Tim Ingold, “Introduction,” in *Creativity and Cultural Improvisation*, ed. Elizabeth Hallam and Tim Ingold (Oxford: Berg, 2007). P.48 as quoted by Wirzba, *This Sacred Life: Humanity’s Place in a Wounded World*. P.227

<sup>13</sup> *Yeh Dil Mange More* – This heart desires more and more

### i. Life to Flourish in Fullness: Turning to the Soil

Acknowledging and recognising God's play with the soil, with knees on the ground and dirt on their hands, the divine breathed their breath into the scoop of soil that the divine made in their own image to make *Adamah* as an earthling filled with life is a significant moment to celebrate life. So, if life has to flourish in all fullness, human beings, as one of the creatures in the creation of God, have to realise and appreciate that we share our being with the soil of the earth. We, as human beings, are "soil-birthered" and "soil-bound." The liturgical words pronounced at funerals: "from dust, we have come, and unto dust, we return" is a calling for living beings to realise the commonality of life and death with the soil of the earth.

The very meaning of 'adamah' as 'earthling' grounds human beings in and with the soil of the earth. It has been observed that "human beings are always dependent for their life on the fertility and fecundity of soil, which in turn, is dependent on the breath of God for its animation."<sup>14</sup> So in the fertility of the soil, human beings find their flourishing, or in other words the healthier the life of the soil, the healthier the life of the human beings. In the life of the soil, human beings find their life. So, if life has to flourish in all its fullness in the creation of God, creatures' interdependence is crucial and particularly turning and attending to the life of the soil is pivotal for all beings to grow together in life.

It is important to recognise that soil has been deemed dirty and has connotations implying it is unclean as it is 'full of germs.' However, millions of life forms find their existence in soil and beneath soil. Biddington in articulating a soil theology, which he calls 'ed apho theology' (which means a theology influenced by soil) explains the theological richness and importance of soil. He says, "The soil thrives as a single living integrated community of complementarity. The soil lives because it co-operates to live. It is a non-hierarchical matrix of interconnectivity and a complex network of life-generating relationality. In its darkness, the staggering and immeasurable diversity of life is self-sustaining. It prospers because its essence is insistent thriving and generous hospitality to each living component. It generates a superabundance of flourishing that it shares without distinction. The soil has so many ways of influencing our theological thinking!"<sup>15</sup> The radical inclusion, complementarity, hospitality, and generosity of soil offer and enhance the lives of all the countless creatures in the creation. Plants, animals and human beings all

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<sup>14</sup> Wirzba, *This Sacred Life: Humanity's Place in a Wounded World*. P.66

<sup>15</sup> Terry Biddington, "Doing Dirty Theology: How Ensoiled Humans Participate in the Flourishing of All Earthlings," *Feminist Theology* 29, no. 3 (2021): 305–17, <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1177/09667350211000611>. P.309-310

share their commonality with soil. So, turning to soil teaches us humility to be willing to learn from soil to make life flourishing for all creatures.

## ii. **Life to Flourish in Fullness: Turning to the Plants**

Jesus as part of his sermon on the mount was speaking to his disciples and the crowd gathered about the worries of life and brought in the metaphors of birds in the air and the lilies of the field for his audience. (Matthew 6:28–33) The reason I think Jesus invites his audience to these life-centric metaphors is to explain that the worries of life have increased since human beings in their busy-ness, have lost their sight, smell, and touch with the creation around and have not considered the birds of air and the lilies in the field as their co-creatures. Therefore, Jesus invites them to turn to the birds of the air and the plants in the field to build a relationship with them, for such a relationship allows them to overcome human worry in life. Allow me here to limit my reflection by turning to the plants for now, and please don't get me wrong that I am putting the birds of the air to a backbench nor am devaluing the importance of birds in the air. I very much acknowledge that there is so much that we can learn from the birds of the air, for that is the very reason that God in Holy Spirit chose to come down on Jesus Christ in his baptism in the form of a bird, a dove. Why should we turn to plants, birds, and animals to attain life in all its fullness? Perhaps, the easiest answer would be because they are our elder siblings who are made ahead of us, and so we turn to them for their experience and witness of life.

The Anthropocene has reduced learning only to human cognition and to human agency, making them the centre of the ecology of life. But an eco-public theological vision of life calls us to turn to the lilies and the mustard seed herbs and all other plant lives to learn from them in order to attain life in its fullness. We celebrate that plants are agencies where we as human beings can breathe out oxygen, we thank God for their agency for temperature stabilisations and for their presence in the ecology.

The first thing we the creatures can learn by turning to the plants is the strength of their rootedness. The impacts of de-ecologisation have uprooted life systems and have made mobility a norm for life and life-affirming patterns, endorsing rootlessness. The busy-ness of life has taught that 'we are always on the go' and 'we are always on the move.' In their rootedness, plants and trees, by being grounded in their place, support the lives of the organisms of all species on the planet. Wirzba on the rootedness of life explains, "Plants can teach us essential things



about the character of the world in which creaturely life proliferates, and in their continuity and communion with where they can show us what a fertility and life-enhancing presence looks like.”<sup>16</sup> An important learning for the creatures is to turn to the plants on what it means to affirm and celebrate life, which is their strength of rootedness.

Secondly, plants make their food and medicine using the conditions in which they grow, from water and sunshine, the available natural resources. That is where the creatures are called to turn to, to make the best use of the natural conditions and resources for sustenance. In affirming their lives, plants participate in making life with the rest of the available creatures and resources.

Thirdly, to speak of plants is always about co-habitation and co-existence with partners, in their case, it is soil, sunlight, and water. So, plant becoming is always co-becoming, for they are to be recognised as a process, as a verb and not as mere object-nouns.

So, turning to plants teaches us that life is in its rootedness and in its co-habitation with other partners. They show us that there is no life that can exist on its own apart from being and becoming with others. Let me now bring in a specific example of a plant that Jesus has used in the parable of mustard seed to explain to his disciples about the kingdom of God. Jesus himself has spoken to his disciples that he is the ‘true vine’ and his father is a ‘farmer,’ (John 15:1), where he de-anthroposises his being with a true vine and calls his father as ‘farmer’ as a de-transcendental divine,<sup>17</sup> which are relevant to our conversations here.

### **iii. Life in All Its Fullness: Turning to Jesus’ Parable of the Mustard Seed**

Jesus spoke to his disciples in at least seven parables about the mysteries of the kingdom of God in Matthew 13, and in 31–33 verses, Jesus shared the parable of the mustard seed. Over the years many have interpreted this parable in terms of size; that the mustard seed is a small seed and grows to become a big tree, and so it should be with the Christian faith. But if we get the facts right, we know that the mustard seed is not the smallest of the seeds for there are many other seeds smaller than the mustard seed. Also, mustard seed grows to become a shrub and it never grows to be a tree, let alone to be the greatest tree. Why then does Jesus share this parable? Yes, I know many will then argue that parables are

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<sup>16</sup> Wirzba, *This Sacred Life: Humanity’s Place in a Wounded World*. P.78

<sup>17</sup> Raj Bharat Patta, “The True Vine and the Farmer,” Political Theology Network, 2021.

allegorical and are told to share a message, and any literal reading of seeking facts might undermine the essence of a parable. As I re-read this parable for our times today, particularly in the context of ecological life in its fullness, I find that Jesus was sharing this parable with a certain degree of abnormality, that the mustard seed will grow to be the greatest tree nesting many birds on its branches. However, through that abnormality, Jesus is conveying a message of critique and a message of hope to his audience then and now, which is a message that the kingdom of God is 'beyond' normal.

#### **a. The (Ab)Normal as a Critique Against the Norm of Empire**

The parable of the mustard seed is recorded in all four gospels Matthew, Mark, Luke and John and also in the gospel of Thomas as a parable shared by Jesus about the Kingdom of God. The audience of these gospels was well aware of the first-century Jewish kingdom narratives, particularly the metaphorical usage of trees representing the rulers and the empires. In the Old Testament, Assyria and Nebuchadnezzar are depicted as large trees providing shelter to many birds on their branches (Ezekiel 31:6 and Daniel 4:12). In both these instances Assyria as an empire provided shelter to many other neighbouring nations and Nebuchadnezzar as a king provided shelter to his people in his kingdom. When Jesus said that the kingdom of God is like a mustard seed which grows to be the greatest tree in the field nesting birds on its branches, though it was not normal for the mustard seed to grow that way, Jesus picked that (ab)normality to critique the norm of empire by warning the colonial powers that such an (ab)normal will be the 'new' normal. The kingdom of God grows in an (ab)normal way, defying the norm of an empire, not in the normal way of growing to be a shrub but in a subversive way of growing to be a tree from a tiny pungent mustard seed. The norm of the empire is that the powerful becomes the tree and under the patronage of the powers and principalities, the rest of the nations and ethnicities seek their shelter. In contrast to that, the principle of the kingdom of God is that out of powerlessness, out of smallness the mustard seed grows to become an (ab)normally greatest tree so that the birds of the air can nest on its branches. The parable of the mustard seed becomes a lens to understand that Jesus' kingdom of God is (ab)normal to the known empires of Assyria or Rome, yet in that (ab)normality those that are different from mustard seeds find their shelter. Jesus shared this parable of the mustard seed as a critique of the norms and normalisations of the empires. Attaining life in its fullness is in contesting the normalisations of the empire and striving to decolonise the kingdom of God from an ecological perspective.

### **b. The (Ab)Normal as a Hopeful Aspiration ‘Beyond’ Normal**

Who would have thought that the mustard seed would grow, become a plant, become a shrub and then turn to be a big tree, the greatest of the shrubs? Jesus by sharing this parable was explaining that the kingdom of God begins as a small seed and then grows (ab)normally beyond normal. This parable expresses a hopeful aspiration of the kingdom of God, for it grows (ab)normally, beyond the expectations of the farmer, beyond the expectations of the mustard seed, beyond the expectation of the field in which it grows, beyond the expectation of all the hearers and audience of this parable. As is the normal, the kingdom of God which is like a mustard seed growing up, the expectation is to grow as a plant and a shrub. But that edge or notion of growing into a tree and into a greatest tree conveys the eschatological vision of the kingdom of God, which is not limited to the normal, which is not limited to the expected, but which transcends and outgrows the normal. By sharing about the (ab)normal growth of the kingdom of God like a mustard seed, Jesus is conveying that the kingdom of God is not what we think as normal where business is as usual, but the kingdom of God is ‘beyond’ normal, with unexpectedness, with surprises, with some shocks, and with no limitations. In that (ab)normality, the kingdom of God provides hope for the mustard seed to become the greatest tree, which was unthinkable and unimaginable. Hope is not knowing the future, but trusting in the God of the future, for God will lead from the known normal to ‘beyond’ normal, into the (ab)normal walking and working with us. Thus, attaining life in its fullness is to be subversive and hopeful about the future of our earth, for God is on the mission of renewing and restoring the creation of God.

### **c. The (Ab)Normal as an Opportune Space for a Different Purpose**

What would be the ultimate purpose of a mango tree? To be fruitful and yield a great harvest of mangoes. Similarly, what would be the purpose of a mustard tree? To grow mustard seeds and yield a great harvest of mustard seeds. This understanding of the purposes of the trees is based on a very human-centred view of the trees, where we selfishly think that trees grow fruits for the benefit of humankind. But when Jesus narrated this parable, he said that the mustard seed will grow to be the greatest tree, and never mentions the harvest of the mustard seeds, but Jesus said “so that the birds of the air come and make nests in its branches.” Jesus presents an ecological vision of the kingdom of God, where the mustard seed grows into a tree to nest the birds of the air. The (ab)normality of this parable grows to a greater height when Jesus narrates that the mustard seed not only outgrows from a shrub to a tree, but also outgrows

to nest the birds of the air. The (ab)normal growth of the mustard seed to become a hopeful greatest tree is not to enjoy the privilege of being the greatest and biggest tree yielding a great harvest, but to be a space of shelter for a variety of birds of the air to nest on its branches. The (ab)normal comes with an ecological vision of trees being grown not to meet the selfish desires of human beings, but to become a space to nest the birds on its branches. With the trees being cut down because of human greed, we can understand how much it affects the housing of the birds. So, if life in its fullness has to be flourishing, we need to recognise that life and life systems are not for selfish needs but for the collective growth of the creatures, which in this parable include the life and housing of the birds of the air.

So, seeking the relevance of this parable today, as we prepare for a return to the creatures around us is the call for us to engage in a spirituality of the (ab)normal growth of the kingdom of God. Such an engagement requires us not to re-turn uncritically to the things we have always done, but to re-envision what God wants us to do at a moment like this. In the present context, I see the church as a mustard seed, and the kingdom of God is where the church grows (ab)normally to be a tree nesting the birds of the air as its ecological missional calling. No one would expect the church to grow into just like a tree, but if we want to be part of the kingdom of God that Jesus inaugurated, it might look (ab)normal, but it is the need of the hour, to become a tree to shelter birds, save them from extinction and save the planet. 'Church planting' is a very common vocabulary in the lexicon of churches today, but perhaps this parable challenges us to strive for plant churches, nursery churches and forest churches, where life is affirmed and celebrated by all creatures of God's creation.

Secondly the (ab)normal growth of the kingdom of God happens as a critique of the empire which comes to us in the form of a capitalist understanding of growth for whom numbers and profits are all that matter. The (ab)normal growth as a church today is recognised not in the yield of the mustard seed harvest, but in providing shelter to many people who do not have shelter, becoming a space of hospitality to all those who are on the move, to those who have been discriminated and excluded because of their identities, to those crossing boundaries and oceans, and by offering to be a Christian presence of sharing love, peace and justice with the creation in our communities. These outcomes certainly sound abnormal to many people for whom the church is all about filling the pews, but the parable of the mustard seed speaks to us to think of the

kingdom of God growing (ab)normally to be a tree addressing housing issues for birds, for people and to all those that are in need of shelter.

Thirdly, the (ab)normal growth of the kingdom of God happens in the unknown, the unexpected and the unimagined ways of doing church. The mustard seed growing to be a shrub was a normal phenomenon, but growing to be a tree, and to be a housing tree is that extra edge that Jesus was pushing the boundaries, which is but the very meaning of the kingdom of God. We cannot follow Jesus without following this 'edginess.' As followers of Jesus, the true vine today, the calling for us is to allow God to push our boundaries to do things that are different from what we have always done and to be prepared as churches to grow (ab)normally, 'beyond' normal, so that we become relevant for our times today.

Allow me to reiterate, for Jesus, the growth of the mustard seed is in it growing to be the greatest tree by sheltering the birds of the air, so it is for the church and church organisations in the design of the kingdom of God. Jesus in a way was abnormalizing normality and normalising abnormality. Jesus elsewhere in Matthew 17:20 said that if we have faith like a grain of mustard seed, we can do the impossible. May God grant us such faith like the grain of mustard seed so that we can grow as a new creation of God (ab)normally by sheltering those needy people in our spaces. May this parable of the mustard seed inspire us as a church in our reimagining to (ab)normally grow as a community of creatures with an ecological vision, and with a communitarian vision with a preference for those on the margins. Perhaps in growing (ab)normally we as a community of creatures will find our relevance of creativity today.

## Conclusion

Early in the year 2021, thousands of farmers in India protested against global capitalism opposing the proposed legislation put forward by the national government and have gained international attention exposing the agrarian crisis in India. P. Sainath, a renowned journalist and a scholar on rural India, described the current agricultural crisis in five words, "hijack of agriculture by corporations." He notes the process by which it is being done in five words too, "predatory commercialisation of the countryside." In another five words, he described the outcome as the "biggest displacement in our history."<sup>18</sup> To put the problem in perspective, the Indian peasants, who constitute the world's largest surviving small farmers over the years, have been under a threat to life due to the neo-

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<sup>18</sup> Colin Todhunter, *Farmers protests reflect existential crisis of Indian agriculture*, in <https://dissidentvoice.org/2021/01/farmers-protests-reflect-existential-crisis-of-indian-agriculture/>

liberal globalisation legislation. On the one hand, there has been an increase in farmers' suicides due to the debts incurred on their crops in India and on the other hand the agrarian crisis is exposing the climate change crisis and its impacts on food sovereignty on our planet today. This is to explain that due to prevailing attitude of the Anthropocene, we see the effects of de-ecologisation where life and life systems are threatened. In such a context the call for us is to re-turn to the creatures for a confession and learning from them. We have discussed how turning to soil and plants will enhance life and pave the way to our collective flourishing today. If I have to explain attaining life in all its fullness as my eco-public theological vision in five words, it would be "creatures collectively create new creation." Such a call will help us address the agrarian crisis, the climate catastrophe and ecological injustices with much care, love and justice for the cause of our planet. Let us turn to plants and soil to be our teachers in this school of life, for together we can flourish and make this earth a better place to live and sing the doxology to the Creator.

In conclusion, I echo what Wirzba explains as some core philosophical and theological values in five principles in our guiding together for common creative creaturely lives. He explains, "Firstly, recover a covenant sensibility—we are called to move from contractual to covenantal way of negotiating our relationships with others. Secondly, advocate for transparent economies—to help *creatures* understand their own coming-to-be within the coming-to-be of places and things. Thirdly, reinvigorate democratic processes—as a work of love for the transformation of communities. Fourthly, build a life-supporting infrastructure—the growing Technosphere has impacted the life systems, necessitating the building of support systems with justice, dignity and respect for all creatures. Fifthly, attend to interior life—preparing creatures and each other to open their lives to the divine love that animates the whole of creation, learning to swim the currents within the currents of God's self-giving ways."<sup>19</sup>

*Our life-giving earth's womb is soon turning to be a tomb  
Plumb and do not succumb to it. Save our earth  
Our earth bleeds because of our greed,  
She'll be pleased if we can take care of her seeds/needs*

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<sup>19</sup> Wirzba, *This Sacred Life: Humanity's Place in a Wounded World*. P.240-254

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## **Deliberative Sessions**

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### **Programme Review and Programme Direction**

A key feature of the 15<sup>th</sup> CCA General Assembly was the Programme Review and Programme Direction Deliberative Sessions. These sessions were pivotal for reviewing the CCA's mission and setting future directions. The review session, on 29 September, utilised resources such as the 'From Jakarta to Kottayam' report, Moderator's and General Secretary's reports, and thematic documents to assess past performance and relevance. The direction session, held on 2 October 2023, focused on envisioning CCA's programmes from 2023 to 2028, incorporating inputs from various assembly discussions and reports.

The participants were divided into three groups, namely, i) General Secretariat, Finance, Communications, and Ecumenical Relationships, ii) Mission in Unity and Contextual Theology, and Ecumenical Leadership Formation and Ecumenical Spirituality, and iii) Building Peace and Moving Beyond Conflicts, and Prophetic Diakonia and Advocacy. Participants engaged in group discussions to evaluate the mandate from the Jakarta Assembly and its implementation from 2015 to 2023, identifying strengths, weaknesses, and relevance. They also envisioned the direction for 2023–2028, setting priorities and suggesting ways to integrate CCA programmes into the life and witness of its constituent members. The outcomes of these discussions were presented in plenary meetings, contributing to the strategic planning of CCA's future endeavours.

### ***Programme Review and Direction - 1***

#### **General Secretariat, Finance, Ecumenical Relationships, and Communications**

*Moderator* : Rev. Minji Kim, National Council of Churches in Korea

*Rapporteur* : Rev. Dr A. Joshua Peter, United Evangelical Lutheran Church in India



## **Programme Review**

The group discussed the General Secretariat, Finance, Relationship and Communication over the past eight years.

Regarding finances, we shared our deep concerns for the churches that have been in despair amid the COVID-19 pandemic and encouraged active financial contributions from CCA member churches over the next five years. We also agreed that CCA is an ecumenical movement exclusively for Asia, which means that member churches should take responsibility for restoring the leadership of the Asian churches.

Regarding the programmes, we agreed to work together to make the CCA's programmes more accessible to various contexts in each region, from local and regional and national councils to the headquarters of CCA and vice versa, and related to the ecumenical formation, we all agreed that there is an urgent need for training programmes to actively participate in the ecumenical movement in Asia.

In addition, we also called on the CCA, as an ecumenical movement network in Asia, to continue to engage with NPO (non-profit organisations), NGO (non-governmental organisations), CSO (civil society organisations), and CoNGO (the Conference of Non-Governmental Organisations in Consultative Relationship with the United Nations) as CCA has done for the past eight years, and to expand its network and programmes to strengthen and deepen our g-local network.

Finally, we concluded the first meeting with a discussion about leadership across all these activities, and how we want to ensure that there is an appropriate balance of leadership experience between people who know the history and people who are experiencing the CCA for the first time, and that all people across gender, age, and region can participate in the work of the CCA.

## **General Secretariat and Administration**

- Appreciation to the leadership of CCA who has kept CCA very active even during the pandemic-caused limitations.
- The General Secretary's Reports 2015–2023 were acknowledged as a wonderful document and with due appreciation to the GS for his open, bold, and transparent way of reporting every matter to the committees.
- Leadership programmes were very helpful for many individuals which resulted in producing good leaders for Church and Society.

- Abolishing the positions of Associate General Secretaries resulted in an increase in the work burden to the General Secretary.
- The reduction of staff in the Secretariat is not a good idea. Cost cutting should be in some other areas but not on staff.
- CCA should continue to commit to doing programmes for strengthening leadership and networking in Asia.
- CCA can count on National Councils to carry out programmes and support them in organising programmes.
- It was expressed that an orientation on how the CCA functions for the better understanding of the newcomers would be a good idea.

## **Finance**

- The increased contributions from the member churches of CCA with reference to the Treasurer's report were received with appreciation.
- It was felt by a member that the list of the Membership Contribution of the Member Churches could have been given as the treasurer only gave the consolidated amount.
- A detailed balance sheet would help in facilitating a better understanding.
- To network with seminaries for conducting programmes as the seminaries have budgets.
- CCA should make a move from depending on partners' contributions and should find ways to keep progressing.

## **Youth**

- It was sad to count only 3 under 30 years in the group; should make sure of the youth representatives at all levels.
- It was acknowledged that the youth leadership programme paves the ways for young people to grow in ecumenism and member Churches shall follow the CCA model.
- It was expressed that when we talk about sustainability, we should focus on youth, not as future leaders but as present leaders.
- Youth and Women Pre-Assembly's reports and resolutions should be aligned in line with the Assembly's outcome.

## **Relocation of CCA Secretariat**

- Should study intensively before taking the decision.
- Should find a practical location.

- The new executive committee can focus on the relocation. A subcommittee constituted for this purpose would be a way to proceed.

## **Programme Direction**

Based on the premise of the first programme review, we gave the following directions.

1. Communication and Relationships
2. Leadership and Proceedings of General Assembly

The first key issue in communication and relationships was the need to facilitate communication between the CCA and its member churches, and among the CCA member churches. We all agreed that CCA should be a platform for ecumenical communities in Asia to flourish, strengthen, and empower each other more actively.

In this regard, we discussed ways to utilise various social media outlets to foster better understanding of the CCA among local churches and to facilitate communication. One example was the idea of providing tools such as a common electronic calendar so that each CCA member can keep others informed of main official events. In addition, we agreed that there is a need for the CCA's materials to be well archived and for various ways to be developed to ensure that CCA members, local Christians, and potential CCA member churches are aware of the Asian ecumenical movement.

The second is leadership. For example, we need a picture of a strategic ecumenical formation in which the young people who participated in the CCA programme can go back to their respective regions and build leadership within their own churches and contexts and eventually develop into leadership that can serve to expand and restore the ecumenical movement in their region and Asia and beyond. A good example of this is that the youth participants of the CCA Seoul Youth Assembly in the 1990s are now the representative leadership of the Asian church.

The issue of relocating the CCA Secretariat will be addressed more strategically by the General Assembly and the Executive Committee, considering regional security, finances, and regional stability, but we all deeply agreed that the cooperation of each National Council and member churches should be prioritized.

In conclusion, we all agreed that while there were many difficult points and challenges as we moved through COVID-19, it also opened new

platforms in the way we connect and communicate in our lives, churches, and ecumenical networks. As you can see from the General secretary's Report on the first day of the Assembly, we were fortunate to have a wider range of people able to participate in the programme because we held the meeting online.

We all agreed that while we will continue to use these different modes of communication for our programming, we will still need to meet face-to-face when we have major agenda items that require us to meet and communicate in person over the next five years and that we will also enjoy a close fellowship to allow us to share our ecumenical companionship in person just as we do now at the General Assembly.

In addition, there were also suggestions regarding the conduct of the General Assembly, such as examining practical measures (for example reducing carbon emissions) to hold an ecologically more sustainable General Assembly and providing interpreters to make the process smoother. This concludes the reporting for Group 1.

## ***Programme Review and Direction - 2***

### **Mission in Unity and Contextual Theology, and Ecumenical Leadership Formation and Ecumenical Spirituality**

*Moderator* : HG Dr Abraham Mar Seraphim Metropolitan, Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church

*Rapporteur* : Romelyn D. Bautista, Episcopal Church in the Philippines

### **Programme Review**

#### **Preliminary Remarks**

- The moderator, Bishop Abraham explained to the group the need to evaluate the CCA's programmes for eight years from 2015–2023, which witnessed the participation of almost 1,339 people.
- Concerning the assigned topic, the moderator further expressed the importance of unity because we have only one God, but in reality, we are divided in many ways.
- This led to the realisation that we must be guided by the Holy Spirit and not by our own egos so that we can unite.

## **Observations/ Reactions on the CCA's Programme Implementation (Evaluation)**

1. CCA implemented programmes such as the Asia Mission Conference, Congress of Asian Theologians, Asian Ecumenical Institute, interfaith programmes, youth and women's leadership development programmes, diakonia, and other advocacy programmes in the Asian context; however, due to financial constraints and other challenges, the implementation of such programmes was limited.
2. When it comes to active participation in CCA programmes, it was noted that Southeast Asia was the most active while there were only a few participants from Northeast Asia.
3. There was a challenge in promoting CCA programmes to member churches at the grassroots level.
  - a. CCA programmes as reported by the General Secretary are all good but we must do something about how much impact we can make.
  - b. Do we have a design to assess the effectiveness of such programmes?
4. We have CCA member partners who are Christians and are in minority groups. There is a challenge for us to make sure that programmes are based on people's initiatives to ensure ownership and active participation.
5. A testimony was shared by one of the participants, who also attended a CCA programme under diakonia, relating to human trafficking. They shared that the challenge after training was about participating in the field when it came to the implementation of action plans.
6. There are pressing issues that each of us as CCA members must reflect upon. Why are some churches not participating? It is necessary for us to interpret "colonizing theology" and understand where we came from.
7. CCA programmes are good programmes, however, the communication system is yet to improve in its clarity or system to ensure that it can reach people and keep them better informed.
8. The experience of a youth participating in one of the CCA programmes on youth leadership is very laudable, beneficial, and encouraging.

9. In the Report presented in the book “Journey of CCA from Jakarta to Kottayam”, on pg.139 we see that there are 40 total programmes implemented, which were attended by 1,339 participants from member churches. The programmes were organised on:
- Human rights advocacy
  - Migration, stateless, and trafficking in person
  - Asian ecumenical disability advocacy network
  - Asia advocacy network on dignity and rights of children
  - Ecumenical solidarity, accompaniment, and Diakonia in Asia
  - Health and Healing
  - Good Governance
10. How much ownership do we have of the CCA programmes?
11. CCA is a very inclusive community.

### **Suggestions/Points for Consideration**

If we are sincere about improving CCA programmes, we must be involved in the following:

- Find creative ways to promote the CCA programme through our churches and ecumenical friends at the grassroots level in our context
- Utilise social media for information dissemination.
- Intensely enhance our fellowship among churches to promote Asian theologies in our context.
- Training of Trainers to nurture and inspire others in a most effective and doable manner.
- Exert more effort in a passionate manner to enhance the cooperation of ecumenical partners.
- Let us be proactive in our community, collaborating with CCA and other partners by sharing resources, manpower technologies, logistics, skills and others.
- Let us practice sharing responsibilities and go the extra mile to ensure the ‘doability’ of our planned programmes, recognising the challenges of finances, language barriers, and other factors
- Assign a monitoring system for how the programme is effectively done or understood in our communities, and what is the participation of the local churches.

Starting today, the group committed itself and declared that we are friends of CCA.

### **Programme Direction**

For the purpose of clarity, we have suggested measures for specific sub-topics:

### **1. Assessment/Impact Evaluations on CCA Programmes**

- Create a volunteer group for the evaluation/assessment for the programmes of CCA. This includes a sincere desire for the effectiveness of every programme that the CCA takes up. This can be done through an impact assessment of the programmes. Considering the financial aspects in doing it, CCA can find creative ways to meet needs through online meetings, consultations, etc.
- The CCA could assist this group for a prior training to equip them on strategies, evaluation criteria, and other doable means for effective evaluation. It includes activities on how to follow up on the results of implemented programmes on the ground.
- The CCA could create mechanisms in contacting participants who are actually involved in and trained with different programmes.
- It is important to note that what we are going to disseminate at the grassroots level is that which has transpired and been discussed at every CCA gathering or programme. Member churches must be encouraged to employ the art of doing so in the context of their own members.

### **2. The Use of Social Media**

- The main rationale for emphasising the mechanism of social media is to enhance the communication and information dissemination aspects of CCA programmes at the community level.
- The CCA could engage the expertise of our energetic young people to help in the use of social media platforms and spread the word on what the CCA is about and what it is doing.
- Strengthen the CCA publication team to employ creative ways through social media to ensure that communications, activities, and programmes of CCA are known to our member churches taking into consideration their context and situations.
- CCA must utilise its member constituencies to effectively communicate important information down to its member churches at the local level (for example, from CCA to national councils of churches, down to its member churches).
- Each country where member churches are based could likewise encourage 1–2 volunteers who are in charge of spreading CCA news to its members or have a quota for likes, shares, or follows as a sign of ownership of CCA programmes.

### **3. Equal Representation in CCA Programmes**

- Representatives from the youth sector verbalise concerns about the engagement of youth and women, especially in the leadership

role in CCA. If it is truly given attention, the youth and women will be given significant space to speak, articulate, and share their valuable contributions to the life of CCA.

- Recognising the issues being raised, the group highly recommends that the CCA should continue to encourage and remind each member church to send and provide equal opportunities for youth and women in every gathering or programme that the CCA is implementing.
- We suggest likewise that the CCA could consider creating a separate programme desk that could specifically focus on concerns for women, youth, and indigenous people.

#### **4. Programme on Theology**

- CCA could encourage the active involvement of the people at the ground/grassroots level who have different actual faith experiences to develop theological awakening, and theology that emerges from the people at the grassroots. On the other hand, a point also raised is to first look at the text before theologising. These things are strongly suggested for sincere deliberation and consideration.
- CCA could look into biblical and theological studies about migration in Asia from the perspectives of policy or economic advantage.

### ***Programme Review and Direction - 3***

#### **Building Peace and Moving Beyond Conflicts, and Prophetic Diakonia and Advocacy**

*Moderator* : Rosiana Indah Purnomo, Gereja Kristen Oikoumene

*Rapporteur* : Rowan Tautari, Te Runanga Whakawhanaunga I Nga Hahi  
(Maori Council of Churches)

#### **Programme Review**

- The session began with a framing of the broader CCA programme including activities referenced in the book “From Jakarta to Kottayam.”
- While it was intended that this session would focus on Building Peace and Moving Beyond Conflicts (BP) and Prophetic Diakonia and Advocacy (PD), questions from the floor were wide ranging and overlapped with other programmes i.e. Mission in Unity and Contextual Theology (MU), Ecumenical Leadership Formation and



Spirituality (EF), and Action Together to Combat HIV and AIDS in Asia (ATCHAA).

- Rather than the allocated two hours for this session, due to earlier delays, participants had approximately one hour for discussion. Despite the time restraints, a significant amount of time was taken introducing the topic and inviting questions. However, this was probably necessary as participants came to the session with varying levels of understanding and needed time to find their bearings on the subject.
- In terms of the three questions that delegates were asked to respond to, the following is a summary of observations and comments made.
  1. Is the mandate of the Jakarta Assembly well reflected in the mission and work of the CCA in 2005-2023?
    - Participants acknowledged the work of CCA across all programme areas and expressed appreciation and support for their ongoing efforts.
    - The volume and breadth of activities was noted. In terms of the two programmes discussed in this session, there were 9 activities under BP and 9 activities under PD (p 58 Assembly Handbook).
    - One participant asked if/how activities were prioritised and allocated funding, given that they were all important. The same participant suggested the need for a strategic plan.
    - Another participant asked about 'Militarisation and Arms Race, Nuclear free Asia' which is listed under BP. It appeared that this activity had not been addressed.
    - The same participant noted the difference between impact and output, noting that the report focussed on the latter.
    - Another participant suggested that AI might bridge the gap between a shortage of resources, funding, and human capacity. In the 2021 report, CCA discussed digital changes brought about by the coronavirus such as online meetings. The participant suggested AI as a tool to support new theological paradigms.
  2. What are the strengths and weaknesses in the implementation of the mandate?
    - While this question was not addressed directly, several participants noted the need for a monitoring and

- evaluation process for each activity. This may have aided participants' own understanding of the impact of activities.
- o Suggestions included:
    - Activities to support mental health for youth, and men's wellbeing. It was acknowledged that there were no men-specific activities.
    - Less paper
    - Utilising the non-tangible assets of CCA i.e., human resources and commitment from Churches
    - Programmes to reflect today's needs and challenges (including women's activities)
3. What is the relevance of CCA work in the life and ministry of the member churches and councils, and the larger ecumenical network?
- o Once again, this question was not addressed directly; however, the programmes were widely acknowledged as being important and having a significant impact on the work being undertaken by churches in Asia. One outstanding example was the work undertaken to support and empower migrant rights.
  - o Concerns were expressed about the future location of CCA's office. Participants noted that this might affect the way programmes are run.
  - o Finally, while BP and PD reflect the importance of social justice and advocacy, there is an urgent need for a detailed review and a streamlining of priority areas to enable better focus and more efficient use of resources.

## Programme Direction

*Moderator* : Rev. Jimmy Sormin, Gereja Protestan di Indonesia bagian Barat

*Rapporteur* : Mr Saw Dah Eh Bway Doh Htoo, Myanmar Baptist Convention, and Rev. Risma Lumalessil, Persetuan Gereja Gereja Kristen Muria Indonesia

- CCA needs to reduce some of the programmes and focus more on quality.
- CCA needs to develop monitoring and evaluation systems; not only for programmes and projects but also the whole system of the CCA working now.

- Programme evaluations for outputs and impacts are important. They are short term assessment periods. The CCA affirmed a Theory of Change that recognises the change and transformation over a long period. Thus, something that is not successful or impactful in the short term may continue in the long term.
- AEWA and AEYA programme agenda strategies should be clearly conducted by CCA.
- Existing programmes: Do we have to name the programme or will it be the same for the next five-year programme because it's better to invite proposals and recommendations by the church members for the next assembly.
  - Response – Some of them will be kept and some will not, by evaluation; also depends on the theme of the assembly.
- What other programme could be ended or celebrated for what they were and how they were conducted – in the interest of sustainability, sustainability of staffs, the institution, financial situation.
- Of all the programmes that CCA has implemented, which one is the most important?
  - Response – All the programmes are important: Mission and Unity in Contextual Theology, Ecumenical Leadership Formation and Ecumenical Spirituality, Building Peace and Moving beyond Conflicts and Prophetic Diakonia and Advocacy, and these programmes will be the same.
- CCA needs to encourage all the churches and communities to do farming to focus more on creation. The CCA has to focus on the mental health and healing of human beings covering all men, women, and youth, so that we can get the strength and energy to renew and restore the creation.
- CCA has to encourage the church members to learn more about indigenous communities as well, and youth involvement in the ecumenical movement should be improved and followed up.
- Focus on creation and re-creation, and also the methodology of long-change programme. There are mainly two ways to conduct the programme. The first is through consultation and the second is building peace and justice by visiting the churches and inviting people from a particular country to greater participation at the grassroots level.
- Strategic programme planning should also be implemented by

local churches.

- A platform for sharing, learning, and developing the existing capacities of members can be created to strengthen capacity and solidarity among CCA member churches.
- A people-exchange programme was proposed for the exposure to traditional knowledge and culture from different parts of Asia and for learning different cultures and traditions by visiting the member churches.
  - Response – The CCA is not going to implement programmes at the community level since its mandate stops at the national level.
- The CCA needs to pay attention to immigration issues such as trafficking, refugees, and conflict, and strengthen efforts through collaboration.
- The CCA should provide scholarship support for younger generations.
  - Response – CCA has scholarship for young people for theological studies.
- The CCA must engage in partnerships and collaborations with other organisations.
- The CCA needs to mobilise the ecumenical pilgrimage movement.
- Mostly CCA discusses issues and problems, but what about the success stories of CCA, how can we share those? Can it be done through social media or any other platform, whether success stories or unsuccessful ones?
- CCA should discuss Artificial Intelligence (AI) for Biblical Studies and Christian Theology.
- CCA needs to have internal reviews or evaluations and launch the platform where we can access the information.
- CCA should discuss the impact of colonisation and how it could affect indigenous spirituality in Asia.
  - Response – How can we invite young indigenous people, especially from Australia and New Zealand?

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## Deliberative Sessions *Churcha*

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A central aspect of the General Assembly was the platform for ecumenical dialogue offered through fifteen different *Churcha* sessions. *Churcha* means ‘conversation’, ‘discussion’, or ‘sharing’ in various Indian languages. The discussions centred on emerging and critical theological, social, and geopolitical issues, through the prism of the General Assembly theme, intended to shape the future work of CCA’s programmes and projects.

All delegates and participants were given options from fifteen different topics and could choose a *Churcha* session based on their expertise and interest. Expert resource persons and speakers facilitated these sessions and guided the conversations to develop focused outcomes that would enhance the CCA’s priorities for the coming years. The three-hour-long format allowed for the participants to delve deeply into their chosen issue and helped generate targeted and concrete recommendations for action by the CCA and the broader ecumenical community in Asia.

The settings for the *Churcha* sessions were the Orthodox Theological Seminary, the Mar Thoma Theological Seminary, and the CMS College in Kottayam.

### ***Churcha - 1***

#### **Responsible Stewardship and Participation in God’s Mission of Renewal and Restoration of Creation**

*Moderator* : Rev. Dr Kim Sungjae

*Rapporteur* : Dss. Blessy Grace M. De Leon

*Facilitators* : Fr Dr K.M. George

Rev. Dr Deonal Sinaga

In emerging Asian contexts, in this post-pandemic world, the mission of the church is to participate in the renewal and restoration of creation, which is central to God's plan for the world. The church must concentrate on the manifestation of the Kingdom of God in its fullness here and now. The lack of stewardship in the care and sustainability of creation presents significant challenges to the church's prophetic witness.

The Bible calls for the responsible stewardship of creation, which God has declared is fundamentally "good" (Genesis 1:31). The pursuit of sustainability, renewal, and the restoration of creation calls for a prophetic witness to the world, advocating for ethical stewardship of God's creation. The ecological crisis threatens the existence of life on earth, and the church's prophetic witness to the world must become more critical than ever.

Churches must engage with scientific experts, with policymakers, and civil society, to develop sustainable solutions by way of acting out missions that can mitigate the ecological crisis. It is never too late to be prophetic.

The Churcha session on 'Responsible Stewardship and Participation in God's Mission of Renewal and Restoration of Creation' compelled Asian churches to lead the way in contextual theological responses focused on the sustainability, renewal, and restoration of creation. Asian churches must act quickly and responsibly, advocating for ethical stewardship of God's creation. The church, as a prophetic witness, must orient its mission to be at the forefront to urgently address the complex and multifaceted problem in coordinated action from all sectors of society.

## **Presentations**

Presentation 1: "From Stewardship to Communion" (Fr Dr K.M. George)

- Fr George opened his presentation with his personal feeling of having difficulty with the pervasive use of the image of the steward to qualify our relationship with the rest of creation. His remarks connect the importance of his presentation as he goes further in discussing the parable of talents.
- He further explains this idea with his first point expressing that in Christian ethical and theological reflection this idea of the steward is often highlighted as an example of responsibility and faithfulness. It is one of the models exemplifying the relationship of human beings to the creation like master, agent, partner, friend,

priest, steward and so on. The steward's responsibility and his relationship to the master as portrayed in the parable are rather moral and legal.

- The second point, the sensitivity to nature and the whole of created reality arises from the depth of our experiential conviction that we constitute one body not only with our fellow human beings but with all material creation, visible and invisible.
- In his third point, he coined a new word, namely, Ecodoxy; 'Eco -'from Greek *oikos* meaning house or dwelling place. He also explained that Ecodoxy is the worship by the whole creation, which is our home, our dwelling place and our body, that praises God. It is the worship of the Creator God by all things, animate and inanimate. This is the fundamental characteristic of the ultimate communion between God the Creator and all of humanity and the rest of creation.
- He ended his presentation with a challenge: "It is only if we develop the deep spiritual sensitivity of being one body with the whole creation, with 'the world God so loved' that we will be able to restore the creation to its pristine capacity for true justice, non-violence, peace, equality of genders, and self-giving communion with all."

Presentation 2: "Missio Dei and Imago Dei: Responsible Stewardship and Participation in God's Mission of Renewal and Restoration of Creation"  
(Rev. Dr Deonal Sinaga)

- Rev. Sinaga started his presentation with a remark that this is the right time for us to sit together, reflect together, and celebrate God's amazing grace in our lives, in our churches, and in our journey for peace, justice and integrity of God's creation.
- In his presentation, he emphasised the need for everyone to carry out the mission to proclaim the Good News as commanded by Jesus Christ- *Missio Dei*. He also expounded the suffering creation experiences, which is a far cry from the fullness of life which God wants us to experience. He also added that our 15<sup>th</sup> General Assembly theme inspires and enlightens us in our journey together to realise fullness of life in Asia and in wider world.
- Part of his presentation is citing Asian Rural Institute (ARI founded by Rev. Dr Toshihiro Takami in 1973) as one of the many endeavours that show how we practically and intentionally advocate for the renewal and restoration of God's creation.

- He then wrapped up his presentation with a challenge from Matthew 5:13 that we are called to “Be salt of the earth”. He also placed emphasis on the fact that we as good stewards and Christ’s followers have a role to play or mission to carry out in our lifetime here on earth.
- *“We are God’s Stewards. As stewards, we are called to take care, preserve, protect and nurture those that belong to God which includes our fellow human beings as well as nature-our Mother Earth.”* — Rev. Dr Deonal Sinaga

### **Issues Raised in Response to the Topics Presented**

1. There are several challenges faced by churches attempting to introduce systems to support the renewal of creation.
2. We can do what we can but there is something beyond our abilities.
3. There are different perspectives of embodying stewardship especially in taking account of the diverse understanding of theological foundation of creation.
4. There is a question of how we analyse the concept of stewardship in terms of our theological misinterpretation that leads to a messianic approach as caretakers, overseers and ones who are accountable to what is being entrusted to us, also emphasising the responsibility to anything that does not belong to us.
5. There are several challenges in pushing forward environmental justice in terms of going against polity and policies, clashing traditions and practices, and restructuring programmes that are now contextually irrelevant.
6. Young people find it difficult to access full and active participation in terms of how they can proactively and fully participate in systems that focuses on creation and nature preservation.

### **Specific Proposals for Future Programmatic Engagement**

1. Enrich and regain our understanding of how we see stewardship catering to modern times but not jeopardising nature for development’s sake. Thus, we should re-evaluate CCA’s and our respective churches’ policies and programmes related to restoration and renewal of God’s creation; ensuring that they may cater to different context but are specific on how we can unify our goals as CCA.



2. We need to identify practical steps that we can take to make significant change, such as going back to our basic calls and advocacies e.g., Reduce-reuse-recycle campaigns, tree-planting, segregation of waste, etc.
3. We should be more intentional in journeying with the churches in decolonising and realigning theological foundations towards Stewardship thus we ask the CCA to provide resources that are contextually relevant.
4. We as people of faith and as part of the whole creation must embrace the virtue of embodying communion as faith expression of being good stewards. This can be enriched by consciously integrating “communion as stewards of God’s creation” in every programme we implement.

## Conclusion

As this session urges us to prompt Asian churches to lead the way in contextual theological responses focused on the sustainability, renewal, and restoration of creation, we are compelled as stewards who are in communion with God’s creation and as forefronts of mission to push forward things and concerns that break barriers, fill the gap and build bridges. No matter how controversial or complex we, as good stewards, are also challenged to popularise unpopular concerns that are most of the time uncomfortably tackled in the open - issues and advocacies which always, in essence, highlight the sanctity of life in totality. When being discriminated against and being silenced, we are led by our good Shepherd always towards shalom.

Together with all those who work for and with us, The Church, as an embodiment of prophetic witness, aspires and acts in providing space for such concerns to come into light. The struggle and journey towards renewal and restoration is an overarching and life-long advocacy. Thus, we believe that it is always in intentional, life-affirming, and collective actions that we can bring about significant change - where high steps come from small steps, just as a spark of hope can brighten a dark world.

Therefore, we pray that as we pursue God’s mission, may we, my *beloved*, *be steadfast, immovable, always excelling in the work of the Lord, because you know that in the Lord your labour is not in vain. (1 Corinthians 15: 58 NRSV).*

## **Churcha - 2**

### **Eco-Spirituality and Liturgical Innovations: An Asian Theological Appraisal**

*Moderator* : Rev. Ko Kwok Hung

*Rapporteur* : Ms Nubpron Panya

*Facilitators* : Rev. Dr Mothy Varkey  
Rev. Christian Tanduk Langi

The church and the mission of God are not two separate entities, but instead, the *missio Creatoris Dei* establishes the *missiones ecclesiae*, indicating that the church exists solely to participate in the Creator's mission. This mission is based on Christology, where Jesus is regarded as the 'Ecological Ancestor'. Each creature within the web of life signifies God's presence, embraced, and invited into God's redemptive future. Through Jesus Christ, the Trinity uniquely entered the developing creation as the Incarnate One; the Word became Flesh, existing as a biological being, sharing the same existence with other creatures on this planet. Every living creature and ecosystem represents God, a reflection of divine goodness and beauty, a spark of divine life, and a revelation of God's goodness.

The congruity of liturgy and ecology is essential for a deeper understanding. Liturgy is an act of attributing worthiness, firstly to God, but also to historical events such as the deeds of the pioneers of our faith, together with the land, animals and birds, bread and wine, and the entire creation that God deemed "very good". Worship extends to all aspects of creation, seen and unseen, celebrating the magnificence of God.

The Churcha session discussed some questions for the Asian churches: Is creation celebrated in our worship services? Do our liturgical traditions include resources that renew our appreciation of creation's beauty and wonder while also calling out the ways humans harm it? How does our liturgy help us spiritually and morally to live in ways that honour the earth? Have we lost the art of awe?

#### **Issues Identified**

In most theologies, there is a question, "Does other creation bear the image of God?" The anthropocentric nature of theologies expressed through liturgies have caused Christians to subdue and dominate instead of serving as good stewards of creation. The participants agreed on the

fact that human beings have been anointed or declared as images of God, but it doesn't mean they can do anything bad against other created beings.

### **Specific Proposals for Future Programmatic Engagement**

1. Open opportunities for discussions on liturgy and Eco theology which tackle the elements of the earth and life's interconnectedness, along with some local wisdom and indigenous peoples' practices and perspective on caring and protecting nature.
2. CCA, together with the churches in Asia, will provide an avenue for advocacy and action for the climate emergency through established programmes and even in expressions such as theology, liturgy and through music.

### **The participants proposed points of consideration:**

1. Paperless conference by distributing soft copies of documents.
2. Virtual - Hybrid Conference which will lessen the emission of carbon footprint and lessen the cost of delegates and participants.

## ***Churcha - 3***

### **Climate Crisis Mitigation and Adaptation; Environmental Sustainability in God's Oikos**

*Moderator* : Ms Yuehwen Lu

*Rapporteur* : Dr Mathew Eben

*Facilitators* : Ms Juliate Keya Malakar

Mr Md Foezullah Talukdar

Climate change has increased the frequency of natural disasters and calamities in Asia over the last two decades. Typhoons, cyclones, floods, landslides, forest fires, droughts, and other natural disasters have devastated the lives of millions of people in Asia. Despite early warnings about the potential dangers of typhoons, earthquakes, and landslides, many people are forced to continue to live in areas that are prone to frequent threats of natural calamities.

Mitigation and adaptation must be emphasised in people's responses to climate change. While there is ongoing advocacy to mitigate the effects of vulnerable situations, it is also feasible to find ways for communities to gain insight into actions that will be taken to ensure their safety and sustainability in the years to come. To mitigate the effects of climate

change in communities, it is critical to investigate the state of the location while considering the hazards identified in recent studies. Once the community and its leaders have identified hazard-prone areas, these measures can be implemented. There is also a call to adaptation and resilience while considering the frequent natural disasters that strike a region. Considering the hazards would also imply selecting the best materials for homes, buildings, and infrastructure built in typhoon- and earthquake-prone areas.

The churches and their local congregations can be effective voices in advocating for environmental sustainability, taking both mitigation and adaptation into account. There are steps that churches can take in helping people better understand the issue, based on Christian theological and ethical principles and also on partnerships with governments, multilateral organisations, as well as other development agencies and organisations

This Churcha session on ‘Climate Crisis Mitigation and Adaptation: Environmental Sustainability in God’s Oikos’ discussed the best practices and models for mitigation and adaptation for environmental sustainability.

### **Opening Remarks**

Moderator Ms Yuehwen Lu, after introducing herself as a representative from the Presbyterian Church of Taiwan, welcomed the gathering and provided a brief introduction to the topic. Furthermore, she introduced Ms Juliate Keya Malakar, the Executive Director of the Christian Commission for Development in Bangladesh, and Mr Mohammed Foezullah Talukdar, who is also affiliated with the same organisation. Additionally, she acknowledged Dr F. Mathew Eben from the Church of South India, who served as the rapporteur for the session.

The Moderator then proceeded to outline the instructions and schedule for the Churcha session. Subsequently, all attendees introduced themselves, sharing their name, profession, nationality, and the church to which they belonged.

### **Introduction about CCDB by Ms Juliate Keya Malakar**

Topics discussed:

1. History and Journey of CCDB
2. Plans of CCDB
3. Association with Government of Bangladesh and other countries
4. Achievements of CCDB
5. Role of CCDB in women empowerment and Youth Development

## **Perception and Data of Climate Change in Different Aspects by Mr Mohammed Foezulla Talukdar**

Topics discussed:

1. Is climate change new or has it been changing from the beginning of the universe?

After extensive discussions among the attendees, the consensus emerged that climate change is indeed a natural phenomenon of the universe and not inherently a problem. However, it was emphasised that the present climate crisis is primarily driven by human actions and intentions.

2. Irresponsibility of mankind towards God's creation

3. Causes and Effects of climate change

4. Severe impacts of climate change

The session was transformed into a group discussion, with Mr Foezullah serving as the facilitator. He initiated the session by posing the question, "Why are people vulnerable to the climate crisis?" Attendees shared a variety of opinions and perspectives on this topic, including:

1. lack of awareness

2. dependence of poor people on natural resources

3. selfish attitudes of human beings

4. role of media

5. need for action plan for people who are directly affected by the climate crisis

The discussion ultimately led to the conclusion that while vulnerable communities, especially the poor, bear the brunt of the climate crisis, it is predominantly the industrialists and the wealthy who bear greater responsibility for the crisis on a larger scale.

Conversations delved into international policies like the "Kyoto Protocol," and it was unanimously agreed that a resounding message needs to be sent: "NO MORE FOSSIL FUELS." The practical challenges involved in transitioning from fossil fuels to renewable energy sources were also addressed. The facilitator elaborated on various misconceptions surrounding the use of renewable sources as a primary energy supply.

In the final session, facilitators provided an overview of the Climate Centre established by CCDB, outlining its various activities and components. Opportunities for collaboration were discussed, fostering a sense of unity and shared purpose among the attendees.

## Conclusion

The consensus reached was that partial measures are no longer sufficient, and it is imperative that we collaborate for a more sustainable and promising future. The Moderator expressed gratitude towards the facilitators for their insightful knowledge and guidance on climate crisis mitigation and adaptation. Additionally, appreciation was extended to the attendees for their active engagement in the discussion.

## **Churcha - 4**

### **Eco-anxiety: Churches in Asia Engaging to Address Health and Healing**

*Moderator* : Rev. Dr Tertius Yunias  
*Rapporteur* : Ms Ma. Kay Cathrine Almario  
*Facilitators* : Dr Renji Mathew  
Dr Suman Varghese Sam

“Eco-anxiety” refers to a variety of difficult emotions and mental states that are significantly related to environmental problems, while “climate anxiety” refers to the climate change-related forms of eco-anxiety. It is pertinent to consider how churches will be able to contribute to addressing this emerging concern and find solutions for fostering healing for those who are grappling with eco-anxiety. This involves posing critical questions regarding the role of the church in offering pastoral care to individuals experiencing challenges of emotions in relation to environmental and climate issues.

The church’s role in initiating community engagements for public health becomes even more crucial in the post-pandemic situation, given the context of pressing health challenges faced by many vulnerable communities in Asia. There has been an increasing trend of commercialisation in church-related medical institutions. Amidst the evolving circumstances of the climate crisis, post-pandemic circumstances, and conflicts in various forms in Asia, it is imperative for churches to acknowledge the shifting of paradigms in health, healing, and overall well-being. As a crucial catalyst for social transformation and the protection of human dignity, the churches have the duty to shape a world where everyone has access to quality healthcare.

The Churcha session on ‘Eco-anxiety: Churches in Asia Engaging to Address Health and Healing’ examined how church communities

can provide space for the wellness of minds and bodies of people through community initiatives. This includes maximising the potential of healthcare institutions of churches and providing pastoral care and support for emotional and mental well-being—thus promoting authentic and holistic health and healing.

Eco-anxiety is a chronic fear of environmental calamities and worries about the future of the Earth. Some of its symptoms includes low mood, disturbed sleep, panic attacks and feelings of anger, guilt, and helplessness. Further, it is an effect of climate-related events and experiences.

### **Issues Identified**

1. Misinformation and fake news on climate change: There have been accounts and incidents of climate change related news which were being circulated through social media that indicates falseness and misinformation which caused many people to worry and caused misinformed conversation online.
2. Deeper and further studies have not been made: This area of study is often underrated and has not been paid attention to for research since it is still a developing idea. Despite frequent disasters occurring these days, the after-effects have not been adequately analysed.
3. Social media's role in the proliferation of climate-related issues which caused anxiety among young people: As mentioned previously, one needs to examine the role of social media on the way climate-related news is perceived and internalised by the people, especially young people. It has become a platform that causes anxiety and hopelessness which should be addressed. Most importantly, it needs to be noted that the youth's social media usage is massive.
4. Limited to no intervention on after-disaster care from the churches: Churches have been actively participating in services focused on relief operations and disaster management, among others, to help out communities affected by climate disasters. However, follow-up interventions from the government, as well as churches, were not undertaken.
5. The government always has disaster management strategies but not enough attention is paid to disaster prevention: The government has its vital role and core responsibility, to create and establish a holistic approach on disaster management and prevention which includes programmes on after-disaster management and

counselling in order to understand the sufferings and situations of survivors and to attend to their mental and physical need.

### **Specific Proposals for Future Programmatic Engagement**

1. Conversations and dialogues are important, especially among young people. Equipping churches to facilitate psycho-social programmes integrated with their disaster efforts.
2. Collective effort in support of communities and walking in solidarity with them.

Programmes can be made to support the aforementioned:

1. Series of initiatives promoting Faith and Scientific Perspectives on Ecology and Anxiety
2. Psycho-social intervention as a service for those affected by the disasters
3. Trauma healing programmes from churches

## ***Churcha - 5***

### **Dwelling in Harmony with Creation: Indigenous People in Asia**

*Moderator* : Ms Rowan Tautari

*Rapporteur* : Mr Imran Mrong

*Facilitators* : Rev. Dr Jacklevyn Frits Manuputty

Rev. Dr Pangernungba Kechu

With rapid industrialisation and urbanisation in Asia, the way of life of the indigenous people and the natural resources they rely on are increasingly threatened. The struggle of indigenous people in Asia to maintain their way of life and protect the environment has gained attention in recent years, as their land and resources have been increasingly encroached upon by development projects and resource extraction activities. Indigenous people have been at the forefront of the fight against environmental degradation and climate change, advocating for sustainable development and the protection of their rights and territories.

Indigenous people have a deep connection to the land, and their traditional knowledge and practices have enabled them to live sustainably for generations. They view nature as a living entity and believe that they have a sacred responsibility to protect and preserve it.

The Churcha session on ‘Dwelling in Harmony with Creation: Indigenous People in Asia’ emphasised the importance of recognising the struggles



faced by indigenous peoples in maintaining their traditional way of life and their crucial role in protecting the environment. Furthermore, the discussion highlighted the importance of recognising the knowledge, wisdom, and practices of indigenous peoples in addressing ecological issues. Their traditional knowledge and practices can offer valuable insights into sustainable living and environmental management.

Rev. Dr Jacklevyn Frits Manuputty discussed Maluku philosophy, where harmony is defined by the balance of reciprocal and dialectical relations between two or more paradoxical entities. This enables contradictions to co-exist in creative tension and provides a starting point from which to discuss a pathway forward. The struggle for Aru Island provided an example of what is happening in one indigenous community right now. Rev. Dr Pangernungba Kechu recounted three stories concerning indigenous peoples in India and posed questions regarding indigenous positioning within the colonial, theological and CCA context.

Participants mentioned other struggles occurring in their countries including Australia, Bangladesh, and other parts of Indonesia. Following the presentations, participants discussed CCA's role in supporting the renewing of creation by drawing on indigenous perspectives and knowledges. The question was asked whether CCA was able to address these matters in its current formation.

### **Issues Identified**

1. Colonisation continues in Asia in the threat to indigenous communities caused by development projects, resource extraction activities and economic exploitation that benefit only a few.
2. Non-indigenous people have little understanding of indigenous histories, ways, and practices and this poses a serious risk not only to their survival, but to the survival of the planet.
3. The biggest challenge for indigenous people is convincing the majority population in their countries to recognise and accept that they are indigenous, have unique knowledge systems, and do not want to be assimilated. This lack of recognition is a form of violence on many levels, including epistemic.

### **Recommendations**

1. That CCA prioritise the intergenerational historical and ongoing trauma of indigenous peoples within Asia, and seeks to find innovative pathways to healing, beginning with proactive listening.

2. That CCA support and coordinate the development of a shared resource concerning indigenous storytelling (through their voices), and this resource initiates conversations on intergenerational trauma and climate justice across all member churches.
3. Given the entanglement of indigenous justice with climate justice, priority be given to supporting the development of indigenous theologies with a particular focus on creation narratives and their intersection with CCA's theme and sub-themes.
4. That CCA establish an indigenous desk, i.e. a programme that focuses on indigenous issues and prioritises indigenous communities.

## ***Churcho - 6***

### **Welcoming the Stranger: Displacement, Statelessness, and Trafficking in Persons**

*Moderator* : Ms Minnie Anne M. Calub

*Rapporteur* : Mr Immanuel Lalrampanmawia

*Facilitators* : Ms Yusmiati Vistamika Wangka  
Rev. Joliffy Daniel  
Rev. David Nigel Perry Brohier

The world is at its greatest level of displacement ever, millions of people have been forced to flee from their countries and escape from disasters and conflicts. It is estimated that 130 million people are forcibly displaced, including refugees, asylum-seekers, victims of trafficking, and other people in need of international protection, internally displaced persons, and those who are stateless. They experience discrimination based on gender, race, and even religion. This is evidenced by how people groups are arbitrarily deprived of nationality, how women are most vulnerable in passing nationality to their children, and how certain religious groups, like the Rohingya in Myanmar, are denied nationality. Discrimination resulting in statelessness can be both a cause and a product of displacement.

It is obvious that these people are marginalised, often forgotten, and subject to discrimination, they are the 'stranger' and 'aliens' in our midst. As disciples of Jesus, we are reminded of this and are called to exercise compassion and care for one another, including for strangers (Matthew 25:31–46). In Leviticus 19:34, Israelites are reminded to treat

the strangers that live among them with love and care because they themselves had once been strangers in the land of Egypt.

The Churcha session on ‘Welcoming the Stranger: Displacement, Statelessness, and Trafficking in Persons’ probed the challenges faced by vulnerable asylum-seekers, people who are forcefully displaced and victims of trafficking to identify practical ways in which churches and ecumenical organisations can aid and support them. It also aimed to raise awareness about the issue and discuss strategies for advocating for their rights and for promoting their dignity as fellow human beings.

### **Issues Identified**

The main issue that we have identified is the problem faced by migrant workers. Migration is not a choice. People are forced to migrate from one place to another for various reasons, such as displacement due to natural disasters, economic inequalities, or lack of economic opportunities. Since this urgent issue has intensified in Asia and requires a collective voice, we recommend that the CCA, being a credible institution, focus strongly on these issues.

### **Specific proposals for future programmatic engagements:**

1. We suggest that the CCA initiate an inventory and mapping app for assets so that we can have all the information that we need from the member churches and councils who have been practicing the ministry in different focus areas, which can be either direct service support, legal support, or advocacy support. Direct service support coupled with advocacy would be a very important aspect of the work of the CCA.
2. Also using an app to create networks where all members can easily get feedback or share data and information and share their expertise and experiences on any other issues. There is a necessity that this should be an inter-religious component and a global platform since migrations would involve different countries, cultures, and religions and that it is our shared responsibility to protect them.
3. Developing theological materials that are contextualised and rooted in the realities, that it inspires the ecumenical community to develop compassion for the ministry.
4. We recommend that CCA initiate a capacity building programme for churches and councils to further develop their own programme and empower the ministry.

5. We request the CCA to take initiative for greater awareness effort of the challenge in an inter-faith or inter-religious levels and possibly support the processors who are in the place for the people in need.

## ***Churcho - 7***

### **God's Design for Life and Human Dignity: Practical Application of Bioethics**

*Moderator* : Rev Dr Kang-Hee Han  
*Rapporteur* : Dr Anna Alisha Mathew Simon  
*Facilitators* : Rev Dr T Aruldas  
Dr Manoj Kurian

The biblical account of human beings “made in the image of God” implies that all human beings possess an inherent and inalienable dignity and worthiness. The book of Genesis also accords a special position to humans who are to be stewards – as they are the only created beings capable of comprehending and being concerned with the good of not only themselves but of the whole creation. There is humility in this responsibility: although humans are made in God’s image, we are not divine ourselves; we are creatures, not creators. The concept of dignity provides ethical guidance in answering the question of what we owe to those at the very beginning of life, to those at the end, to those with severe disability or dementia, and even to tiny embryos. Seeing human beings as created in the image of God means valuing other human beings in the way a loving God would value them.

Moral, ethical, and even religious discourse has not kept up with the accelerated and astonishing development of biotechnology. Questions of bioethics relate to the ethics of life itself—with the use of science, technology, and medicine to create, protect, prolong, or end life. The discussions in this session are expected to fall into the theological discourse on the sanctity of human life, the dignity of a person, and the classic understanding of body and soul. What are the ethical concerns or dilemmas of such technologies; are they harmful or helpful to human existence? Can the use of animals or human embryos for such research be justified? How do we respond to the extreme suffering of people near death? If biotechnologies can bring life to those who are suffering and vulnerable, could this be Divine Will to help people?

The Churcha session on ‘God’s Design for Life and Human Dignity: Practical Application of Bioethics’ deliberated on the biological, ethical, and theological perspectives of God’s design for human life.

## **Churcha - 8**

### **Resilience of Ecosystems for the Sustainability of Creation: Towards Life-Giving Agriculture in Asia**

*Moderator* : Rev. Dr Joshuva Peter  
*Rapporteur* : Rosiana Indah Purnomo  
*Facilitators* : Han Kyeong Ho  
Rev. Dr Daniel Premkumar

The Life-Giving Agriculture movement is a grassroots movement that promotes sustainable agriculture practices as a means to promote healthy ecosystems, support rural communities, and achieve sustainable livelihoods in Asia. The Life-Giving Agriculture movement promotes agro-ecology, which stresses the integration of ecological principles into farming practices such as composting, crop rotation, and intercropping, all of which promote soil health and crop yield, and reduce the need for chemical inputs. The movement also encourages the use of locally adapted crop varieties and the preservation of traditional knowledge. The movement is rooted in the support and advancement of small-scale farmers and rural communities through providing access to credit, promoting farmer-led research and innovation, and investing in rural infrastructure such as roads and irrigation systems.

The Life-Giving Agriculture movement is gaining momentum in Asia, as more and more farmers and communities recognise the benefits of sustainable agriculture practices. The movement has been successful in promoting sustainable agriculture practices in rural areas, improving food security, providing sustainable livelihoods for farmers and communities, and even contributing to the health and resilience of ecosystems.

The Churcha session on 'Life-Giving Agriculture for Sustainability of Creation in Asia' explored the role and responsibilities of churches in addressing sustainable livelihood in Asia and advocacy towards food for all.

The Churcha meeting was kicked off by the moderator's introduction saying that our concern in this topic has shifted from climate issue to climate crisis and now to climate emergency. In fact, Asia is the biggest contributor in farming. Then, Dr Peter introduced the first facilitator, Han Kyeong Ho to deliver his presentation.

Hans presented the history of Life-Giving Agriculture history and development, also the biblical aspects of the LGA. Furthermore, he explained the Nong theology, the theophylosophy basis of the LGA, which means going back to the ground. From that point, he elaborated some dimensions of Nong theology: 1) God created humankind as *Homo Colens* (Gen.2:5,15); 2) the murder of Cain and the beginning of city life; 3) the history of salvation began with leaving the city life; 4) the relation between Jesus and the Roman Empire; and 5) Christians as the beings of eco-diakonia.

Due to the time constraints (break), the forum was able to entertain only one question. A participant asked on what is the best way to translate 'nong', which was answered by Han as coming back to the ground, in which ground is not only about the farming ground but also about (taking care) of Eden/garden of life/eco-diakonia.

Further, a participant took the Bible passage on Isaiah 32:17-32, pointing out the 'soul and soil'; relation to help and sustain life. Adding to that, Han said that the concept of abundant land is not merely about the production capacity of the land, but obeying God by occupying good soil and ground.

After the break, the Moderator introduced the second facilitator, Rev. Dr Daniel Premkumar. Dr Premkumar started with a question: what can the church learn from creation-friendly farmers? After that, he elaborated on the domains of creation-friendly Agriculture, which include: 1) LGA as gifts of the Spirit, that should be embodied in the life and ministry of churches; 2) the domain of next generation; and 3) the domain of science and technology.

The discussions revolved around engagement of young people in Agriculture, as young people seem not too interested in the same these days. The recommendation was to bridge the gap by introducing, through direct experience, opportunities for young people to reconnect with nature and showing how technology and science (in which young people are more expert) can be harmoniously used. Aside from that, cooperation between rural and city churches is needed to support agriculture.

The Moderator drew the following conclusions: church's contribution to agriculture shall consider the biodiversity and commit to sustaining the ground/soil: therefore, traditional farming and biodiversity should be maximized to promote eco-justice.

## ***Churcha - 9***

### **Restoring Balance for Gender Justice and Environmental Healing**

*Moderator* : Dr Anish K Joy

*Rapporteur* : Ms Joy Han

*Facilitators* : Ms Nirmala Gurung

Ms Wellorich Sohkhlet

Rt Rev. Emelyn G. Dacuycuy

Ms Agnes Souisa

The environmental challenges faced today demand a holistic approach to solutions that consider the interconnectedness of social, economic, and ecological systems. This requires a shift away from the exploitation of nature and women and towards an understanding of the interdependence and interrelatedness of all living beings.

Environmental degradation and gender violence are closely related because they are both products of a patriarchal worldview that privileges power and domination. Both are forms of exploitation and oppression that result from the same underlying attitudes and beliefs that justify the domination of one group by another. Gender justice and environmental healing require analyses of the intersections of gender, race, class, and environment, and how gender injustice perpetuates environmental degradation and vice versa. Furthermore, patriarchal systems often exclude women from decision-making processes that affect the environment, such as land ownership and resource management, leading to unsustainable and exploitative practices.

To restore balance in the environment, gender justice must be an integral part of environmental policy and action. This includes the empowerment of women in manifold ways, especially in access to resources and decision-making processes. It also means promoting gender-sensitive approaches to environmental protection and restoration that recognise the unique perspectives and experiences of women.

The Churcha session on 'Restoring Balance for Gender Justice and Environmental Healing' discussed how environmental degradation and gender violence are not isolated problems but rather symptoms of a larger system of exploitation, and how addressing these issues together will help realise a more just and sustainable world for all.

## Issues Identified

- Violence against women and girls. Women in all locations have personal everyday experiences of varying degrees of violence against women, be it patriarchy both inside and outside the home, inside and outside the church; rape culture online and offline, in the Global South and North; not to mention specific issues affecting local-global contexts which many CCA resources have already catalogued in detail;
- Toxic masculinity remains an issue in the perpetuation of patriarchy and rape culture in all contexts, and we affirmed that all genders suffer from the effects of the patriarchal socialisation of boys and men, albeit in different ways;
- The mental health of all genders in climate emergency situations is too often side-lined in the face of immediate needs for food, water and shelter;
- Liturgical and ecclesiological contradictions and hypocrisy cause and enable gender injustice and climate injustice. For example, human traffickers have abused theologies of revelation or vocation to render women of faith vulnerable to exploitation. Superficial and token acts by church leaders to perform mere semblances of gender equality initiatives for social media consumption or to shore up statistics are an open secret. Churches, including our own CCA Assembly, can still do better in terms of environmental stewardship, even as we repeatedly state our commitment to climate justice;
- Listening to the stories of oppressed and survivor groups is only possible where a conscious effort is made to create an appropriate space. Therefore, challenges remain in amplifying the stories and voices of such groups so that we can continue raising awareness; and
- People in established or powerful positions may remain resistant to change, despite others' desire and capacity to restore balance.

## Specific Proposals for Future Programmatic Engagement

We affirm the good work and the strengths of the CCA's programmatic engagement, not least the learning and sharing of best practices, and the enablement of storytelling for raising awareness. Our proposals for future work follow:

- Intentionally strengthen the capacities of, and spaces for, people facing injustice to speak up. Opportunities for advocacy include



striving for adequate financial stability or independence for relevant groups, especially women, because this substantially improves one's capacity to speak without fear of retribution. Similarly, organisational budgeting can be made more gender-responsive by determining the extent to which expenditure has detracted from or come nearer to the goal of gender equality. A gender-responsive budget is not a separate budget for women but rather a set of tools that analyses budget allocations from a gender perspective, and can be subsequently used to advocate for reallocation of budget-line items to better respond to women's priorities, as well as men's, making them gender-responsive;

- We, as the CCA, must do better to reflect our commitment to gender equality among our office-bearers. Women and gender minorities are not visible among the seated positions on the stage at this General Assembly;
- Enhance gender-responsive facilitation: Reflect that gender justice and environmental healing is for everyone in how we convene our forums: e.g., women's issues are not exclusively "women's work". Notwithstanding the abovementioned need for appropriate spaces in order help people speak up (e.g., women-only or women-majority forums have a role to play in storytelling and supporting advocacy), all forums must address gender justice and environmental healing as a top priority;
- Given the resistance to change among establishment and older institutions, we should continue to find ways to ensure that younger generations enter leadership, especially within our churches and including in CCA office-bearing roles. Younger people and other groups who are better sensitised to the issues at hand must enter more leadership positions; and
- We must find ways to bridge the gap between theory and practice, by reflecting on our practices and changing them where appropriate, as well as continuing in theological scholarship to better attend to the intersectionality that gender has with class, caste, race etc. Climate change affects women differently depending on these other factors.

## Appendix

Furthermore, specific areas for gender sensitivity and responsiveness as identified by our facilitators include:

- legal frameworks: integration of gender perspectives throughout the policy and programme cycle, from planning to design,

- implementation, monitoring, evaluation and review; to harness the support of different stakeholders, including civil society organisations and development partners, to support national governments to provide space for women to voice their concerns and ensure their priorities are incorporated in decision-making on climate change and renewable energy plans, and strategies; and
- monitoring and evaluation: When tracking the progress of implementation, of actions, outcomes and results, it is important to consider the gender dimensions in the methodology, indicators, sex-, age- and diversity-disaggregated data collection and analysis approaches. It is important that measuring the impact of interventions aimed at attaining gender equality and women's empowerment relative to what was planned or intended is done through developing gender indicators.

Moreover, there continues to be opportunity to link up with partner councils, NGOs, and other groups to amplify the impact of their efforts.

## ***Churcha - 10***

### **Theology of Fullness of Life and Restoration of Creation**

*Moderator* : Rev. Jimmy Marcos Immanuel

*Rapporteur* : Ms Trudy Hepshiba Bandara

*Facilitators* : Bishop Feliciana Tenchavez

Dr Citra Fitri Agustina

Ven. Ngodup Dorji

Mr Aan Sasono

The theology of fullness of life has strong links with churches' calling to participate in the Mission of God, or *Missio Dei*. The church's participation in God's mission includes the flourishing of life and underscores the important role of 'earth-keepers' who affirm the calling to be stewards for all creation.

The term 'fullness of life' has emerged as an important ecumenical affirmation over the last century. It emphasises the point that the God who created the *oikos* constantly works, loves, empowers, sustains, and restores the creation. It is an important contribution to the socio-economic development discourse, which, in its focus on profit and unchecked growth, has often evaded, or compromised on, the concern

for 'the fullness of life' for all of creation. The unprecedented present-day challenges to the 'fullness of life' may lead to the collapse of humanity and the environment as we know it, and thus it is of paramount importance for churches to engage with social and ecological ethics and counter deprivation, exclusion, and fragmentation.

The Churcha session on 'Social and Ecological Ethics for Fullness of Life and Restoration of Creation' addressed important questions such as how can the concept of 'life in its fullness' serve as contextual and relevant theological interpretation in the mission of the church? How does this concept enrich our ecclesiology? How does this concept impact the witness of the church in the public sphere and society?

The first session was conducted by Bishop Feliciana and Mr Aan Sasono. They shared about the Christian perspective on the theology of fullness. The forum discussed:

1. The LGBTQ community and disabilities.
2. When God created the world, everything was perfect but nowadays people suffer with different problems.
3. What is the meaning of Christian perspective?

The second session was conducted by Dr Citra Fitri Agustina, Ven. Ngodup Dorji and Mr Aan Sasono. The group was divided into two groups and we addressed important questions such as:

1. How can the concept of "life in its fullness" serve as contextual and relevant theological interpretation in the mission of the church?
2. How does this concept enrich our ecclesiology?
3. How does this concept impact the witness of the church in the public sphere and society?

The concept of fullness will bring inclusivity, equality, and acceptance of all genders and by knowing each other, by knowing about each denomination, we can solve the problems that can affect fullness and it does have a positive impact in a pluralistic society; society will accept the church in a positive and universal way.

We started the group discussion by trying to understand the scope of the term "mission"; to answer the question of how "life in its fullness"; serves as contextual and theological interpretation in the mission of the Church. The last commission of Jesus Christ entrusted us with the duty to go and make disciples of all nations. We therefore have to spread the Gospel and the principles and values attached to it. God is the creator and He created

us in His image and likeness and placed us in this universe, intertwined us with it, so that we can take care of the universe as co-creators and stewards.

On the second question on how this concept enriches our ecclesiology, the group discussed and deliberated that the relationship of humans with nature has to be understood in a sacramental and holistic perspective, seeing God as the owner of whole creation.

On the third question on how this concept impacts the witness of the Church in the public sphere and society, the group deliberated that we, as Christians, should live and practice according to the principles and values enshrined in the scripture in our relationship with nature. This way we encourage others to follow these principles when they witness the impact and contribution of the Church in bringing out positive changes.

## ***Churcha - 11***

### **Holistic Approach to Economy, Ecology, and Oikoumene in Asian Context**

*Moderator* : The Very Rev. Eleuterio J. Revollido

*Rapporteur* : Mr John Paul Devakumar

*Facilitators* : Rev. Prof. Dr Dr h.c. Dietrich Werner  
Prof. Dr M A Oomen

The term ‘oikoumene’ refers to the ‘whole inhabited world’ and encompasses its economic, social, and ecological systems. It affirms the interconnectedness between economic activities, environmental impacts, and social justice concerns, and offers a framework to holistically address them. In light of the dire situations that increases the fragility and vulnerability of life, there is a pressing need for Asian churches to adopt a more comprehensive and integrated approach to addressing economic and environmental issues.

The ecosystem has suffered from development aggression over the years. Human attempts to generate wealth through improved business and economic ventures have harmed the environment by contamination of water, soil, and air, deforestation, and extraction from land and sea that have endangered not just the environment, but also the lives of animals and of the indigenous peoples who regard these places as sacred.

Churches today are compelled to emphasise the spiritual connections between humans and nature. and promote environmental stewardship

and caretaking of the ‘whole inhabited earth’. These initiatives can include advocating for fair trade practices, supporting local businesses and cooperatives, promoting sustainable economic practices, reducing energy consumption, investing in renewable energy, promoting sustainable agriculture and forestry practices, protecting natural habitats and biodiversity, and reducing pollution and waste.

The Churcha session on ‘A Holistic Approach to Economy, Ecology, and Oikoumene in the Asian Context’ aimed to explore the role of Asian churches in promoting a holistic approach to sustainable development and to consider how economic growth can be achieved without compromising environmental sustainability and social justice in the oikoumene.

## ***Churcha - 12***

### **New Social-Environmental Ethics for Restoring Ecological Equilibrium**

*Moderator* : Rt Rev. Dr Daniel Selvaratnam Thiagarajah

*Rapporteur* : Ms Loini Simeti

*Facilitators* : Ms Hiu Fan Chung

Rev Dr Victor Tinambunan

Adv. John Suresh

With the earth in such a state of distress, it is difficult to achieve ecological balance. Experiments and economic activities have both played a significant role in destroying environmental harmony. Plant and animal species, as well as the environments in which they live, have become the targets and victims of exploitation and unethical behaviour.

To restore ecological balance, it is necessary to revisit the ethical standards that have been established over the last century. New international standards should be established to prevent further habitat disruption and the extinction of animal and plant species as a result of economic activities. There is a need among academics and the ecumenical movement to strengthen social-environmental ethics in response to the groaning discord seen among all created beings and nature itself. There is a need for the ecumenical churches to take a stand that benefits the whole inhabited earth.

Creating a new social-environmental ethics based on scientific principles and a biblical foundation may be a more effective response to the earth’s

groaning and chaotic state. This ethical standard must govern not only the secular world but also the churches themselves in carrying out initiatives that benefit the environment and all of creation.

The Churcha session on 'New Social-Environmental Ethics for Restoring Ecological Equilibrium' deliberated on the ethical values and principles and discussed meaningful practices for ecological equilibrium.

Rt Rev Dr Daniel Selvaratnam Thiagarajah welcomed the facilitators, Ms Hiu Fan Chung, Rev Dr Victor Tinambunan, Dr Adv. John Suresh and the 12 participants that attended the Churcha on "New Social-Environmental Ethics for Restoring Ecological Equilibrium". Ms Hiu Fan Chung, Rev Dr Victor Tinambunan and Dr Adv. John Suresh, presented on their field of work and shared with the participants issues and practical actions that they strongly believe will make a change and be able to restore ecological equilibrium.

Group 12 identified issues and also specific programmes that we strongly believe the CCA can adapt and introduce to all church members so that the goal of this year's Assembly theme can be achieved.

### **Issues Identified**

- The current releasing of the Fukushima wastewater to the Pacific Ocean
- Nuclear Power Plant
- Cable car construction in Seolrak Mt (this causes transforming of mountains to cater for this construction)
- Overproduction of products such as clothes/plastic that will end up in the environment
- Evidence of the Earth warming up
- Human error is increasing because of the disease called greed (people wanting more than they need)
- Deforestation
- A drastic decrease in flora and fauna which causes ecological imbalance
- Overexploitation of the natural resources and destructive practices
- Illegal mining/Poaching (Coral, Sand)
- Development and Pollution (Industries and Sewage)

### **Specific Proposals for Future Programmatic Engagement**

- Coastal conservation and livelihood  
This refers to the Fabrication and deployment of artificial reefs to enhance marine fishery resources (Artificial Reef deployment) and

enrich the coastal biodiversity. From doing this there will be a reef for fish forever and sustainable harvest of fish in the reef zone for sustainable livelihood.

- Forest of Grace in Mongolia  
This practice can be a work of the church to allow the youth a piece of land so that they can plant trees and cultivate it; by this we help generate forests within the next 5 to 10 years, educate young people on Agri-forestry and on building relationships.
- Christian Conference of Asia needs to establish a specific group that will pay attention to Ecological problems. This group will solely focus on research and education on climate change/justice/crisis-related publication seminars and workshops. They will inform all member churches of strategies they can adopt to help with the environment and all living organisms. The member countries will report directly to the group; by doing this there will be solidarity and advocacy between CCA and Member churches.

### ***Churcha - 13***

## **Reconciliation with God's Creation for Moving Beyond Conflicts and Building Peace**

*Moderator* : Mr Mervin Toquero

*Rapporteur* : Ms Jyoti Singh

*Facilitators* : Rev. Dr Kim Minji

*Presenters* : Dr Cho Young Mi  
Ms Patricia Talbot  
Rev. Nam Gi Pyung

The ecumenical movement has been playing an important role in expressing solidarity and journeying for peace and reconciliation towards the restoration of creation. The role of ecumenical bodies and churches in Asia has been to offer platforms for promoting dialogue and understanding among diverse stakeholders, including churches, faith communities, and civil society organisations. This can be done by building communities of peace that are able to transcend and overcome conflicts. Through dialogue, the churches can play a pivotal role in breaking down barriers and fostering mutual understanding and trust among the people and communities who are living in conflict situations. Churches, as agents of peace, have a unique opportunity to encourage and support reconciliation efforts in all broken societies.

The situation in the divided Korean peninsula is a specific situation in which the churches and the ecumenical movement have contributed immensely to promote reconciliation and peace amidst an ongoing conflict situation during the past seven decades. The efforts made by the ecumenical movement for peace, reconciliation, and reunification of the Korean peninsula are evidence of the paramount importance given over the decades to addressing concerns regarding long-standing division and the desire for a harmonious future. Overcoming the historical fragmentation in the Korean peninsula, and the restoration of creation through the process of reconciliation is imperative in today's emerging geopolitical contexts. By promoting initiatives that address the pain, trauma, and injustice caused by the division of the Korean peninsula, churches can contribute to the reconciliation process and pave the way for a more peaceful and unified future.

The Churcha session on 'Reconciliation and Restoration of God's Creation for Building Peace and Moving Beyond Conflicts' discussed the role of ecumenical bodies and churches in Asia as partners in solidarity with the people and with divided communities in journeying towards the restoration of peace and reconciliation in the specific context of the situation in the divided Korean peninsula.

### **Issues Identified**

Dr Cho Young Mi shared how billions of dollars are spent by countries on military build-up instead of on the basic needs of the people and in addressing climate change. The 70 years of tension in the Korean Peninsula, perpetually preparation for war by both North and South, and their respective allies, are contributing to this. The armistice signed by both parties 70 years ago did not alleviate the tension. This issue is not discussed deeply in global geopolitical scenarios as the war had no winner and thus, for the world at large, it is a forgotten war but for the people of Korea, it's a never-ending war of conflict and disharmony even after seven decades of stalemate. The Korean War is the longest standing US conflict. While it no longer consists of active fighting, hostilities between the warring parties have remained high, resulting in the extreme militarization of the Korean Peninsula.

The conflict in the Korean peninsula has a great influence on the security landscape of Northeast Asia. Because of this, an exploration of a variety of future possibilities regarding the rapidly changing Korean Peninsula and preparation for a sudden change is timely in order to



avoid any catastrophic result. The internal conditions, such as the North's nuclear weapons programme, its ongoing political transition process, and the policies of regional powers such as the United States, are the most important factors in determining future outcomes on the Korean Peninsula. Based on a thorough exploration of these critical uncertainties, it concludes that policy-makers of the Korean government and regional powers should take seriously the possible efforts to promote peace on the Korean Peninsula by creating a stable relationship and just communities. It is a kairos moment for the people of Korea. Ecumenical moments, churches within Korea, NGOs, and government powers should actively pursue reconciliation and cooperation between the South and the North, beginning with those areas which can be most easily agreed upon.

A peace agreement would be a crucial step toward denuclearizing the Korean Peninsula. A peace agreement would be a major step toward ending the U.S. policy of perpetual war and shift national resources from the military to more basic human needs. This will help Korea to celebrate life and the richness of the land to flourish and grow in peace for all. During the discussion the following issues were discussed:

1. What capabilities do we need to build to strengthen the movement for peace on the Korean peninsula and East Asia?
2. What knowledge tools and resources are needed to strengthen the movement for Peace on the Korean Peninsula and East Asia and help them move beyond conflict and build Peace?
3. What are the existing advocacy-opportunities (Church/national/regional/global) for peace on the Korean peninsula?
4. What space do we need to create to enable advocacy for moving beyond conflict and building peace?

The group had a single voice for supporting the desire of the people of Korea for a peace agreement that will lead to unity and reconciliation not only in the Korean Peninsula but in the entire region.

### **Specific Proposals for Future Programmatic Engagement**

The group suggested the following way forward:

- Churches believe that Jesus Christ is the giver of Peace, therefore churches must not suggest that peace is an alternative but that peace is the imperative.
- Churches and councils should engage in conversations to start addressing the issue of Korea and the need for peace and support the campaign for peace in the Korean peninsula.

- CCA should bring together countries that are in similar situations, like India and Pakistan, to have a common platform to re-visit history and share experience, with honesty. This will help to develop narratives which can be instrumental for peace building and sharing of strength and weaknesses as ways forward.
- Liturgical and reading materials/articles on the issue need to be developed, published, and disseminated. Music and short videos should be developed and popularised.
- Continue to strengthen women's engagement.
- Youth awareness has to be strengthened. Young people in Korea think that this matter does not affect their lives as they have other pressing issues. Workshops, seminars, and other public fora with civil society, churches and ecumenical bodies are needed to create awareness among the youth in Korea for the need for peace and knowledge about the history of the country.
- Churches should provide counselling and refuge to people who are fleeing the regions. Churches and Ecumenical bodies need to start dialogue across the borders of North and South for reconciliation.
- Media, including social media, should be maximised for the campaign.

The presentation by Dr Cho Young Mi is a powerful tool for advocacy that should be shared for awareness raising. Peace in the Korea Peninsula is not solely a concern of the Korean people but it needs to be viewed in light of its impact on peace in other Asian countries and the defence of God's creation/nature for a better and meaningful response and result.

## ***Churcha - 14***

### **Challenges of the Digital World and Pitfalls of Technological Advancement**

*Moderator* : Hannah Manickyam Cassandra Mesa

*Rapporteur* : Rev. Mathew George

*Facilitators* : Mr Lipin Raj

Dr Nilmini Surekha Goringe

Mr Vaughn Geuseppe Alviar

Digital technologies, which have reached around 50 percent of the developing world's population during the past two decades, have advanced more rapidly than any innovation in contemporary history

and are transforming entire societies. The rapid growth of technology and its adoption in various sectors of society have brought about significant changes in our lives. However, this advancement has also led to various forms of exploitation and harm, particularly in Asia. The misuse of technology has led to environmental degradation, violation of human rights, and increased economic inequality. It has also given rise to cyberbullying, cybercrime, and other forms of digital exploitation. Asia has benefited from technological developments such as higher living standards, economic growth, and easier access to information. But there are a great number of risks that technological advancement brings with it.

It is crucial for us to be mindful of the pitfalls of technological advancement and to take proactive steps towards ensuring that technology is used in a responsible and ethical manner that benefits all members of society. We have an important role to play in advocating for a more just and equitable use of technology in Asia.

The Churcha session on 'Challenges of the Digital World and Pitfalls of Technological Advancement' critically examined the impact of technological advancement in our societies and how that advancement can lead to exploitation. This topic raised several questions for discussion, such as: What are the specific forms of exploitation and harm that have arisen due to technological advancement in Asia? How can churches and ecumenical organisations address these issues and advocate for change? What ethical and moral principles should guide the use of technology to ensure that it does not lead to exploitation and harm?

The Churcha began with the moderator introducing the resource persons for the Churcha session and by restating the theme of Churcha group 14. The theme document raised three questions:

1. What are the specific forms of exploitation and harm that have arisen due to technological advancement in Asia?
2. How can churches and ecumenical organisations address these issues and advocate for change?
3. What ethical and moral principles should guide the use of technology to ensure that it does not relate to exploitation and harm?

The moderator Ms Messa, along with the resource persons, Ms Goringe, Mr Libin and Mr Alviar raised pertinent questions regarding the use of technology in church activities, which was followed by a discussion.

## Issues and challenges

1. The appropriate framework for debate  
There is a vital need to find an appropriate philosophical/theoretical frame to speak regarding the relationship between humanity and the digital world.
2. Digital world and the image of God  
Innovation, invention, and creativity are traits that arrive from the image of God within us. Thus, discovery and invention are a natural part of being created good.
3. Governmental and corporate surveillance and privacy issues  
In some of the countries of our participants, the neighbouring country was employing surveillance on the Christian communities. In a common case, the data shared by online users are often used by third-party companies, and the permissions for the same are often confusing and stated in legalese that users tend to skip.
4. False image  
Humans are created in the image of God and social media tends to create a false image of human beings that distorts the image of the Creator God in us. This is prominent in body self-image issues among teenagers, the marginalisation of various communities by dominant groups, often de-humanising them.
5. Shaping power of media  
As James K. A. Smith points out, the combination of market and (social) media are powerful in terms of developing and influencing behaviours that reward the market financially. According to current studies, they can shape our desires and even rewire our neural networks. The need for affirming embodied practices of spirituality that counter the desire-formation of the market needs attention.
6. Technology as opportunity  
Despite its harmful effects, the role of technology in enhancing human life ought to be affirmed. For faith communities, this is an opportunity to enhance and magnify its efforts in service and stewardship inspired by the Gospel.
7. The void within  
The superlative achievements of humanity in terms of technological advancement have also been accompanied by a deep sense of dissatisfaction. It points to the fact that humans desire and thrive in community, and therefore technology cannot replace the void within, which ought to be filled by connection and communion with God, nature, and one another.

8. Digital Technology and electricity in the face of natural disasters  
One of the group participants noted that the cyclones in West-Timor regions had cut off electricity for many months. It was the time of the pandemic and services were held online. The lack of electricity made digital devices redundant, it was difficult to help the community. A lot of digital data was lost. Therefore, the need for backup plans and offline backups in the face of disasters, calamities, and also events such as hackings, etc. need to be planned by the Church communities.
9. Addressing sexual violence in online media  
Technology has enabled human vices, particularly sexual violence, to intensify and find newer avenues. There ought to be social media and online ethics for pastors and the community so that these digital technology platforms may not be misused.

### **Proposed Solutions**

1. The need for preparing policies for use of digital media and financial platforms in church: Participants shared an example where people use QR codes at church to send money and by scanning it from the live-streaming screen. Money comes in from different sources making it difficult to tie contributions to specific individuals so as to acknowledge donors.
2. The need for developing a concrete theological-philosophical-ethical response to the digitality on steroids: Digitalisation has been corporate-led, employed by governments and have been market-oriented, thereby pervading the whole ecology of life. It is a digitality on steroids that is marked by speed, scale, simultaneity, etc. as noted by Ziauddin Sardar in his concept of 'postnormal times'. The Church needs a solid theological-philosophical-ethical response to the same.
3. Addressing the digital-divide: Technology is still for the rich and the landed. Therefore, this gap, even as society digitizes itself more and more, needs to be taken seriously, so that the marginalised community receives the access and benefits of digital life.
4. Formulating a Christian digital-technology ethics: The rapid development of digital technology and devices took the world by storm and churches are still catching up on how to address the issue. A Christian way of approaching digital technology through one's attitudes, behaviour, and response, needs to be developed as instances of online hate, abuse of social media, the translation of human vices on to its online environment, needs to be addressed.

5. Equipping the faith community with media studies and media literacy to inhabit the world more meaningfully: There is a greater need for a deeper engagement of the Christian community with media studies and media literacy. Insights from the outcome statement of the Asian Ecumenical Youth Assembly, 2018, are deeply meaningful in this regard.
6. Cultivating digital well-being: Digital well-being is an area that needs a curriculum. The group recommends preparation of curricula that would be incorporated into Sunday school studies and continues to be engaged with in the faith communities' spiritual endeavours. These curricula may state how the digital world can be inhabited and engaged with more meaningfully by the Christian community, thereby being a light to the world. It may also involve training material to teach parents on how to use technology meaningfully and mindfully especially in the context of family life.
7. Developing a theology of humanity in relation to technology: In the light of the emerging technologies, there needs to be a closer engagement with what it means to be human, in the light of more and more devices that assist human beings in various states and stages of life (E.g., pacemakers, digital prosthetics/assistive devices). This will help users navigate the challenges of being human and enable a more just and life-giving engagement with the rapidly innovating technologies.
8. Inter-disciplinary approaches: The engagement with technology needs to be interdisciplinary by nature. For example, while we affirm the benefits of digitalisation, and paperless work, it is also important to acknowledge how much energy consumption, and green-house gas and heat emissions technology are needed on its back-end in order for it to function efficiently. This calls for developing theological and ethical engagements wherein eco-theologians help empower marginalised/vulnerable communities, who will bear the brunt of digital marginalisation and ecological degradation, resulting from a digital world on steroids.

## **Conclusion**

The triune God wants to keep his connection to humankind and tech is unable to do the same. Connection with God and humanity needs to be affirmed in its material forms, practiced through social connections, material practices such as the Eucharist and sacraments, even as we use technology to remain connected to the distant and disadvantaged.

Community is the trademark of the church. Therefore, the rapid developments in technology can help us revisit, reimagine and reconceptualise the life-giving ideas of togetherness, fellowship, and community. In this regard, the CCA can help assist the member churches in developing theological, theoretical and practical methods, adapting it to be thoughtful so that the Church can engage with these technologies in a just and life-giving manner, after the nature of Christ.

### ***Churcho - 15***

## **Understanding Ekklesia and Diakonia: Supremacy and Self-referentiality, or Creative Collaboration?**

*Moderator* : Rev. Mahn Palmerston

*Rapporteur* : Mr Thomas Edison

*Facilitators* : Rev. Prof. Dr V. Varghese Thomas

Rt Rev. Steven Lawrence

Rev. Tara Tautari

God has intentionally created all species with purpose and interconnectedness, inviting them to participate in the shared breath of life. As partners in God's mission, we are called to engage in a profound dialogue regarding the care for creation and to re-examine the traditional anthropocentric understanding of the church's nature and service. This challenges us to adopt a new approach to being a faith community, an ekklesia that acknowledges and embraces our relationship with the earth and its bio-history; an ekklesia which denotes being "called out" from something and toward something. What is the nature of this calling –is it solely a human prerogative or does this extend to all of creation?

Similarly, we must consider the meaning of diakonia, the spiritual gift and ministry of serving (Romans 12:6–7) and its contextual nuances. Churches that seek to uphold Kingdom values must foster a transformative mindset that respects the Earth's limitations. This necessitates a shift in mentality, addressing eco-justice concerns, and embracing the conviction to change our lifestyles, consumption patterns, travel practices, waste management, and values to promote eco-social transformation. The church's diakonal mission extends beyond sustainable development goals (SDG) discourse and aligns with the priorities of all God's people, rooted in local communities, culturally integrated, and transcending divisive partisan interests.

As the ekklesia, the church is called to be a vessel of diakonia, providing accompaniment, support, and contribution to address emerging crises and respond to the challenges of life. Diakonia encompasses acts of care, healing, reconciliation, service to marginalised communities, empowerment, advocacy, prophetic mission of speaking truth to power, and denouncing structural injustices. It also includes addressing environmental issues and ensuring climate justice as part of eco-diakonia, essential for the renewal and restoration of the broken creation.

The Church on 'Understanding Ekklesia and Diakonia: Supremacy and Self-referentiality, or Creative Collaboration?' deepened the understanding of the church's calling and service that should extend beyond human beings and encompass the well-being of all creation through a shift in mindset, practical changes in behaviour, and active engagement; as ekklesia, in eco-diakonia, for the restoration and flourishing of the earth.

The presentation started by an explanation of the nature of the church from the days of Jesus Christ up until today and how its nature has been changed in its journey. For some Christians, Church is projected as the club of the holy people, not sinners.

Throughout the journey, Christianity has had many negative impacts on global society, such as the Crusades, Western colonisation and the system of slavery in America that victimised Africans and so on and so forth. And at the same time, the narrative of Jesus' birth and the life of Jesus gives us some positive aspects to liberate the marginalised and oppressed communities of the society. For instance,

1. Mary- How can it be possible? (With God nothing is impossible.)
2. Good news for the downtrodden shepherd who were taking care of sheep on the margins of mainstream society.
3. Jesus Christ is always against pseudo-spirituality (supremacy/ power structure)- anger towards injustice and the evil religious system of that time. If someone is overtaking others or is dominant over others, the God of all will be on the side of the oppressed.

Mistakes in our Mission Strategies:

1. Misconception of vision – buy the kingdom. We are co-workers of God's mission (*missio dei*).
2. Instrumental rationality which means we can fix all problems ourselves rather than seeking the help of others.
3. The Church is a community, not an individual activity. Church is not any individual's personal property.



4. Keep switching churches (45,000 dominators).
5. Churches are in the hand of the emperor who took the control of the church to have power over the people of the church and to promote their dominant ideology. Therefore, we failed to become the salt and light of this world. In such a context, there is a need for wider ecumenism.

In India, the gospel came in through a mode of power and it was introduced in India as a kind of counter-religious culture, against other religions of this country, and not with the aim of being in respectful dialogic relationship with other or neighbouring faith communities rather emerged as a counter religion of this country. Thus, there is a need for wider ecumenism to heal the mother earth and the society at large.

There is also the issue of creation which requires that we explore ways in which the church can play a vital role in bringing back peace and justice in terms of creating a just, environmentally friendly society. When the creation of God suffers in various ways, how can we do justice to God's creation and well-being of the future generation? Mostly, we misunderstood the word stewardship and dominion over the creation of God. The right to rule here does not mean the right to exploit our co-creation. To do good as stewards we need to engage in creative collaboration. Stewardship should be inclusive in nature not exclusive. This Creation does not belong to us, it is the work of God and God is the owner and author of this creation.

Creative collaboration needs to have prophets who seek justice. We need to seek justice on behalf of creation by doing advocacy against the evil structures of society and against government policies that destroy the nature of God's creation.

To live our lives in this world, the impelling factor for humankind is the whole creation. Thus, there is a need to have relationship with our co-creation. Stewardship gives us a clear understanding of this idea. Therefore, there is a need to revisit our call, in terms of spreading the good news to the people who are in marginalised situations and the whole creation of God to heal God's creation, of which we are called to be co-creators in the human sphere. Our ideology should change from the anthropo-centric to the Eco-centric if we are to create an inclusive society.

### **Specific Proposals for Future Programmatic Engagement**

Suggestions:

1. Gospel must be preached in the purity of life and in transparency, like in the early Apostolic Church.

2. Shift from individual spirituality to community-oriented spirituality.
3. Shouldn't we discontinue the practice of looking upon people as commodities to be converted on whom we force our ideology?
4. Church should practice the act of hospitality and should not view people as mere targets for conversion.

Only then will we have a chance for creative collaboration with the people in our neighbouring faith community to heal the earth.

Questions to reflect upon this issue:

1. What is our relationship with God's creation? (individual's involvement in creation)
2. What does it mean to participate in God's creation and hospitality?
3. What is the need for us to be involved in practicing hospitality towards God's creation?

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## Business Session

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### Report of the General Secretary

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*Dr Mathews George Chunakara*

I feel honoured and privileged to have this opportunity to address you all as delegates and participants of the 15<sup>th</sup> General Assembly of the CCA and present the General Secretary's report, which is mandatory and customary. It is also my joy to welcome you again today on behalf of the Officers of the Christian Conference of Asia, especially when we begin our official business sessions.

It is more than eight years since the 14<sup>th</sup> General Assembly of CCA was held in Jakarta, Indonesia in May 2015. The constitutional mandate stipulates the General Assembly to be held once every five years. However, the outbreak of COVID-19 and the subsequent situation compelled us to postpone the date of the Assembly twice: first from 2020 September to 2021, and then to 2023. It became inevitable that we had to wait eight years to hold the CCA Assembly, the longest gap since the first Assembly that was held in Prapat, Indonesia in 1957. Finally, we have reached this destination, Kottayam, by the grace of God.

The General Assemblies of the CCA, since its second Assembly, are considered radiant mosaics, composed of the diverse hues of Asian Christian traditions, the interwoven threads of ecclesial unity leading to common action for wider ecumenism. Although the General Assembly is the highest decision-making body of the CCA, it is also the largest representative ecumenical regional gathering of the Asian churches, where the pulse of the Asian churches resonates. The General Assembly is an occasion for assessing the visible manifestation of 'life together' of the Asian churches, a coming-together that resounds with hope and commitment to collective witness, service, and mission. As each Assembly convenes, it weaves new chapters into the Asian ecumenical

pilgrimage, reflecting the evolution of Christian thought, expression, and action as well as setting up guiding principles for future directions. The 15<sup>th</sup> General Assembly is yet another historic milestone and an occasion for assessing the ecumenical journey of CCA during the past eight years.

Eight years ago, the General Assembly elected three officers as Moderator, Vice-Moderator and a Treasurer and I joined with that team as the new General Secretary. But today when we are meeting here two of those Officers are not with us. Archbishop Willem T.P. Simarmata passed away in June 2022. The Vice Moderator Rev. Diana Tana informed us earlier of her inability to continue in the Vice Moderator position as she had resigned from the membership of her church. The CCA Executive Committee subsequently made alternative arrangements as per the constitutional provisions and elected an Acting Moderator, Bishop Dhiloraj Canagasabay, and an Acting Vice Moderator, Bishop Reuel Marigza. Both have been members of the current Executive Committee starting from the very beginning of this term and in that way, it was helpful for ensuring the continuity and coherence in decision-making processes in the Executive Committee meetings. I am sure that like me, all of us value the leadership and contributions of these two senior Asian church and ecumenical leaders as officers.

### **The Assembly amidst the Asian context**

The context in which the Assembly is taking place has not been so congenial for most of us as a once-in-a-century game-changer for the world, COVID, presented enormous challenges to all of us. The COVID-19 pandemic, a generation-defining event that happened during our lifetime with far-reaching implications proved that it was not only the most severe public health emergency in recent history but also an economic and social crisis of unparalleled proportions that has been affecting every aspect of human life. Now it is evident that the Asian countries are undergoing their worst economic shrinkage due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The resultant economic weakness is likely to set back the region's socio-economic progress and is predicted to push a significant number of people into unemployment and poverty while increasing inequality. In this context, an urgent challenge facing Asian countries is to figure out how to survive and thrive. For most Asian countries, economic recovery in the post-COVID period can be advanced only by greater efforts to boost longer-term resilience and sustainability. The measures needed will be coordinated, targeted responses to mounting climate risks, new and creative ways and measures for addressing poverty and inequality,

harnessing digitalisation to drive sustainable economic growth, increased productivity. Human capital development and financial inclusion should be important post-pandemic policy priorities in Asia. It is predicted that the Asia Region would contribute about 70 percent to global growth this year—but still faces challenges from inflation, debt, and financial vulnerabilities.

### **CCA Amidst Changing Geo-politics in Asia**

Asia's rise has captured the popular imagination for three decades. However, there are variations in perceptions and views when we closely look at the emerging Asian contexts from time to time. One may say that such variations are often obvious and evident in all aspects of life, including emerging trends in geopolitical, geo-economic, and geo-strategic arenas in Asia. Asia has emerged as the world's third pillar, along with the United States and Europe. Indeed, many commentators have argued that the 21<sup>st</sup> century will not only be dominated by key Asian states such as China, India, and Japan, and major middle powers including South Korea, Vietnam, and Indonesia but also that the region as a whole is on its way to eclipsing the West.

Multiple risk factors affect Asia in areas. Strategic competition will intensify, with countries striving for greater self-sufficiency, especially in the technology and military spheres. A geopolitically assertive China will seek closer collaboration with non-aligned countries and those that are currently more US-leaning. Taiwan will remain a focal point of contention in US-China tensions. There are many kinds of conflicts and disputes in which countries such as China, Japan, South Korea, North Korea, India, and Pakistan are involved. Dispute over the South Sea and Taiwan is another area. There are many other issues and problems related to territorial disputes, population, and cultural variations among Asian countries. These differences can be a main contributor to Asia's security challenges. For example, the fact that China is both the biggest country and economy in Asia can be regarded as a threat to other Asian countries, which may cause other hidden security issues. The complicated relationship of international relations as well as the tension between countries has a fundamental effect on the relationship with neighbouring countries. The east Asian security environment is stranded in a deteriorating situation. The prospects of peace, stability, and unity in the Korean Peninsula, and the impact of this on Asia's geopolitics and power game among different nations across Asia in West Asia, South Asia, Southeast Asia and Northeast Asia with their competing interests affect the peace and security in the

region.

It is in this context that CCA has been called to be a prophetic witness in a changing Asian context and respond to the emerging situation as part of our Christian faith. The CCA is not just a mere ecclesial body that focuses or concentrates only on certain traditional areas of mission and evangelism. The role and function of the CCA are very clearly articulated as believing that “the purpose of God for the Church in Asia is life together in a common obedience of witness to the mission of God in the world”. In this context, it is pertinent that CCA is called to address the manifold challenges amidst Asia’s emerging realities as part of its faith, vision, and mission”.

### **Post-Jakarta Assembly programme restructuring**

The 14<sup>th</sup> General Assembly held in Jakarta in 2015 highlighted the need to restructure the CCA’s programme areas as the Constitutional Revision Committee recognised the need for a new programme structure. The 14<sup>th</sup> Assembly instructed the new Executive Committee to restructure programme areas that aligned with emerging ecumenical, ecclesial, and missiological contexts and realities. The constitutional amendments adopted by the 14<sup>th</sup> Assembly gave mandates and wider scope for restructuring of programmes. As per the provisions in the new constitution, there is only one programme committee now, instead of three different programme area committees and the three moderators in earlier times, with a total of forty-five members. In the new structure, we have now one programme committee with 20 members and a chairperson.

The Executive Committee, which met after the Jakarta Assembly adopted a new five-year Strategic Programme Plan for the period starting from 2016, which largely reflected the vision of the CCA for shaping a new paradigm in ‘living together in the household of God’. The revised programme structure was organised into four core areas: Mission and Unity and Contextual Theology (MU), Ecumenical Leadership and Ecumenical Spirituality (EF), Building Peace and Moving Beyond Conflicts (BP), and Prophetic Diakonia and Advocacy (PD), along with the special Action Together to Combat HIV and AIDS in Asia (ATCHAA) project.

### **Programme Highlights Since Jakarta Assembly**

The period between CCA’s post Jakarta Assembly, starting from the mid-2015 to the Kottayam Assembly in 2023, has been a challenging period for CCA. A comprehensive report of the CCA’s journey over the

past eight years from Jakarta to Kottayam has been shared with you all, and it is posted on the CCA website also. The narrative style of this report illustrates detailed accounts of the work the CCA has initiated and implemented including during the lockdown period.

The CCA, which exists as an organ and a forum of continuing cooperation among the churches and national Christian bodies in Asia, has tried to achieve the expected objectives such as the promotion and strengthening of the unity of the churches in Asia. Its constitutional mandates seek the exploration of opportunities and the promotion of joint action for the fulfilment of the mission of God in Asia and throughout the world; the encouragement of Asian contributions to Christian thought, worship, and action throughout the world; the development of mutual awareness, fellowship, and sharing among the churches in the region, and of relationships with other regional ecumenical organisations and the World Council of Churches. Various programmes and activities have been initiated and implemented by CCA in cooperation and collaboration with its member constituencies and partners, aimed at achieving the expected goals in respective areas. The programmes focused on various issues and themes in the stimulation of initiatives and experiments in dynamic Christian living and action, development of effective Christian responses to the challenges of changing societies in Asia, the promotion of relationships with people of other faiths in Asia, the protection of human rights and human dignity, and the promotion of caring for the creation in a spirit of stewardship.

The implementation of all programmes that had been initiated and planned faced unexpected and grave challenges with the outbreak of COVID-19 in early 2020, causing widespread health crises and socio-economic-political impacts across Asia. As life came to a standstill during the pandemic crisis, we reflected on our shared vulnerabilities and tried to express solidarity in different ways. Consequently, the General Assembly and other planned programmes had to be postponed, prompting the CCA to swiftly adapt by organising a series of webinars on COVID-19 and related topics like health, gender, children, migration, and trafficking, as well as several relevant programmes conducted entirely online. The CCA also accompanied churches in crisis situations during the pandemic. The CCA office adhered to Thai government directives and transitioned to remote work while successfully engaging a diverse audience through virtual programmes. When the global travel restrictions eased in mid-2022, the CCA reintroduced in-person programmes. Although the Strategic Programme Plan was originally envisaged for five years, the

mandate was extended from five years to eight years, given the onslaught of the COVID-19 pandemic, and lockdown situations.

During the past eight years, we were able to organise a total of 224 programmes through four programme areas in which 9,693 people from various Asian countries attended. Participation of women and young people in CCA programmes has increased during the past 8 years. This total number of participants does not include the large number of participants who became part of major events such as the Diamond Jubilee celebrations held in Yangon, Myanmar in 2017 or those who were part of the Asia Easter celebrations organised in conjunction with the Asian Ecumenical Youth Assembly in Manado, North Sulawesi in Indonesia in 2018. Both events attracted the participation of thousands of people coming from various local congregations. As the pandemic situation paralysed the entire world for more than two years, it affected the implementation of several CCA programmes during that period. However, as it was originally designed, and initiated a wide range of programmes and activities were implemented in areas such as mission and witness in unity (MU), ecumenical formation and leadership development (EF), building peace and conflict resolutions (BP), and prophetic witness and advocacy (PD).

Ever since the founding of the CCA, our forefathers affirmed and articulated the vision that the central calling of the ecumenical movement is to respond to the quest for mission and witness and unity. They often affirmed that ecumenical movement is more than a movement for One Church in one place in Asia, it is a movement providing impetus for the Church to proclaim and live out the message of the gospel of Christ in Asia through united witness and participate in God's mission. The Asian churches also shared their insights and motivations that should sustain the ecumenical movement are not only based on addressing ecclesiastical divisions, but they should be focused on sustaining the spirit of overcoming the obstacles to unity of the whole inhabited world of all God's creation. The churches in Asia realised that the things that unite us are greater than those that divide us. It is with this conviction that the CCA was engaged during the past eight years also with the main objectives of strengthening its mission and witness in a multi-religious context; revitalising and nurturing the ecumenical movement through a united witness in Asia; developing contextual theological undergirding for mission and witness while addressing emerging issues in Asia; and strengthening collaboration and cooperation among ecumenical actors



in mission and witness in unity. The programmes and activities that were planned and conducted during the past eight-year period tried to achieve objectives broadly in areas such as mission and witness in a multi-religious Asian context, inter-religious cooperation amidst growing religious intolerance, contextualization of theology and ecumenical theological education, leadership development in new churches in Asia, young Asian women doing theology, and creating ecumenical theological educators' network and database in Asia (ETENDA)

As a regional fellowship of Asian churches, CCA has been following a constant policy of focusing on ecumenical formation and ecumenical leadership development which are essential components for responsiveness to God's call for unity. In the search for developing ecumenical formation as well as leadership, CCA believes that all efforts require a pedagogy relevant to ecumenical formation and leadership development at the grassroots level in order to replace the old, classical approach of defining and interpreting ecumenism as a platform for addressing ecclesial unity or disunity. It is with these convictions that CCA has been focusing its ecumenical formation and leadership development training through the ecumenical enablers' training in Asia (EETA), youth leadership development, women's leadership development, nurturing ecumenical spirituality and contextual liturgical tradition, the renewed ecumenical impetus for grassroots ecumenism especially in the so-called "forgotten areas" in the ecumenical movement such as in countries like East Timor, Cambodia, Laos, Bhutan, and Nepal. The ecumenical formation training CCA organised for Bible School teachers in refugee camps on the Thai-Burma border is now considered a unique activity. Another important concern of these days, changing family values in Asia, and the Christian response also was a focus of this particular programme area. (EF)

CCA realised the fact that Asia faces an ever-increasing level of multifaceted social, economic, political, and security challenges; a wide array of problems is precipitating in Asian societies, causing threats to peace and denial of justice. Armed conflicts and violence, increasing poverty, inadequate health care, economic exploitation, environmental degradation and exploitation of natural resources, militarization, arms build-up, nuclearization, the spread of small arms and light weapons, domination and intervention of major powers from outside the region as well as within the region; ethnic and religious conflicts, communal violence, and political unrest; torture, custodial death, suppression of people's legitimate right to self-determination; lack of rule of law

and democratic governance, peace with justice and human security, accompanying churches and communities in conflict situations, churches in action for moving beyond conflicts and reconciliation were part of a series of programmes organised through the programme area Building Peace and Moving Beyond Conflicts.

Diakonia is central to what it means to be the church and fulfilling the church's mission and witness as servants, and Diakonia is a core component of the gospel, which is not an optional, but an essential part of discipleship, prophetic witness and advocacy, which emerged as a primary concern of CCA. So, the CCA affirmed that Diakonia is a gift of the Holy Spirit and a manifestation of practical love for human beings. While initiating and organising the programmes, CCA has been conscious of the fact that in a situation where the world is becoming more broken, where the sin of injustice abounds, God in Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit calls the church to gather God's people of communities. It was in these contexts that advocacy on initiating churches' response to militarization, nuclearization, and arms race in Asia, eco-justice for sustainable peace, regional and global advocacy, human rights in Asia, and ecumenical advocacy at the UN, rights of migrant workers, human trafficking and statelessness, marginalisation of indigenous and vulnerable communities, upholding the rights and dignity of children, and health and healing, Disability Advocacy Network, Ecumenical Solidarity Accompaniment, and Ecumenical Diakonia in Asia also were priority programmes and activities of CCA from 2016 to 2023. The special programme, Action Together in Combating HIV and AIDS (ATCHA), to deal with and equip churches to Combat HIV and AIDS was continued with expanded programmes and activities and with enhanced human resources. In order for Asian churches to address the increasing menace, a strategic approach was initiated in enhancing the capacities of the CCA network in the areas of advocacy, self-assessment of churches' inclusiveness by using appreciative inquiry methods, exchange of learning and sharing of resources within CCA and inter-faith networks, motivating youth as change agents, specific advocacy related to prevention, care, support, and treatment to global and concerned organisations, development agencies, and government, strengthening regional and national interfaith networks for the exchange of learning, expertise through the Asian Interfaith Network on AIDS (AINA) with focus on interfaith advocacy and encouraging mutual support within faith-based communities and organisations in Asia, etc., were initiated during the past eight years.

Some of the major events CCA organised during the past eight years include the Asia Mission Conference (AMC) in 2017 with 300 participants, Asian Ecumenical Youth Assembly (AEYA) in 2018, with about 400 participants, Asian Ecumenical Women's Assembly (AEWA) in 2019 with 250 women participants. The AEWA-2019 was the first Asian ecumenical women's Assembly that CCA organised. The month-long training programme for ecumenical formation and ecumenical leadership development, the Asian Ecumenical Institute (AEI), has been revived since 2016 as a month-long residential programme; this was continued except for two years of lockdown, during which the course was conducted online for the same duration of one month, as always. The programme on Ecumenical Women's Action Against Violence (EWAAV), a new initiative, has been focusing on the rights and dignity of women. As part of EWAAV, capacity building initiatives and advocacy and awareness-building were organised at national, sub-regional and regional levels during the past eight years.

The Young Ambassadors of Peace in Asia (YAPA) programme, started in 2016, has been providing training for young people to be peacemakers in Asia. The YAPA has trained 20 young peace advocates every year since 2016 and helped a new generation of young peace activists to build peace, healing, reconciliation, and interfaith harmony. About 160 young ambassadors of peace in Asia (YAPA) were trained during the past eight years.

The International Consultation organised by CCA on 'Towards Revitalizing the Ecumenical Movement in Asia' in July 2017 was an enriching experience as it helped to reflect on the situation of the ecumenical movement in Asia. This Consultation was organised as part of the 60<sup>th</sup> year of the founding of CCA. Sixty representatives from various churches as well as ecclesial and ecumenical organisations in Asia came together and reflected on the need for renewed commitment and a shared vision to revitalise the Asian ecumenical movement, urging increased cooperation and coordination among ecumenical actors and their respective constituencies.

Environmental challenges, and human-made abuses threatening the sustainability of God's creation were addressed through different programmes organised at the regional and national levels. Asia's developing economies are faced with serious environmental problems that threaten to undermine future growth, food security, and regional stability. Asian countries are faced with a series of environmental and ecological problems and urgent attention is warranted in areas such as water

management, air pollution, deforestation and land degradation, and climate change. The focus of a national-level consultation organised in 2020 was on 'Contextual Theology and Sustainability of Creation'.

Observance of Asia Sunday on an annual basis continued for the past eight years. The specific thematic focus of Asia Sunday in previous years included 'Korea: Towards Unity in the Bond of Peace' (2016), 'Prophetic Witness to the Truth and Light, in Asia' (2017), 'Embracing the Differently Abled, and Upholding Their Dignity' (2018), 'Stateless and Trafficked people: Our Common Pilgrims' (2019), 'God, Heal Us as We are Vulnerable' (2020), 'I am the Lord Who Heals You and Restores Your Health', (2021), 'Christ's Love Reconciles and Unites' (2022) and 'God, Renew Us in Your Spirit and Restore the Creation' (2023).

Since its inception in 1997, the Congress of Asian Theologians (CATS) has been a dynamic force in nurturing innovative theological thinking in Asia. The CCA has taken a prominent role in promoting the Asian theological agenda within the Asian ecumenical movement through CATS. Recognising the need for a clearer articulation of Asian theologies, cultivation of new methodologies tailored to the Asian context, and the enhancement of academic and professional training for Asian theological scholarship, CCA organised and facilitated CATS Summits. CATS–VIII in 2016 and CATS–IX in 2019 were held in Kochi, India and Medan, Indonesia respectively. The CATS–X was scheduled to take place in 2021. An online CATS–X Advisory Committee meeting was held in April 2021, with the participation of representatives from FABC, ATESEA, and BTESSC. The meeting decided to develop a theme and sub-themes for CATS–X, focusing on emerging issues in Asia. Discussions included the COVID-19 pandemic situation and theological agendas, resulting in the proposed theme, 'Will of God' and 'Healing and Restoration of Community', but it was postponed due to the lockdown situation. Over the years it was recognised that CATS' impact extended beyond theological discourse, strengthening the foundations of the Asian ecumenical movement, and nurturing ecumenically committed leaders within Asian churches. Recognised as a valuable instrument initiated by the CCA in 1997, CATS has actively engaged in global theological dialogues, making a distinct Asian contribution.

The CCA has consistently demonstrated its mission of advocacy and accompaniment in different ways. The compilation of public statements, communiques, and letters of solidarity spanning the years 2015 to 2023 bears witness to the commitment of Asian churches through the CCA to stand against injustice, uplift the oppressed, and echo the transformative

message of love and hope.

One of the last programmes we organised in the current programme cycle that ended by mid-2023 was the Asian Church and Ecumenical Leaders' Conference (ACELC), which was held in Jakarta, Indonesia, in the first week of May. The ACELC was attended by 101 leaders of the CCA member constituencies—Moderators, Presiding Bishops or Primates, General Secretaries, heads of churches, and the General Secretaries of national councils of churches.

### **CCA's Programmes Evaluation**

CCA undertook a major evaluation process some years ago. Based on the recommendations of that evaluation process, CCA subsequently introduced several changes in the organisational and programme structures. Those changes were introduced starting from the period of the Jakarta Assembly. With a new programme structure and governance structure in place, the executive committee decided to undergo an evaluation. Two external evaluators were selected by the Executive Committee and their report has been finalised, which will be shared with everyone for further discussion.

### **Emerging Concerns and Ecumenical Responses**

Numerous other emerging concerns also need to be addressed in Asia as part of our Christian witness. Growing trends of religious intolerance, sectarian strife, persecution against religious minorities, ethnic and religious conflicts, etc., are some of the emerging concerns that need to be addressed as these problems haunt people in different parts of Asia such as in Pakistan, Iran, India, Bangladesh, Myanmar, West Papua, southern Thailand. The politicisation of religion and religionization of politics are major reasons for continued disharmony and religious intolerance in Asia.

A matter of serious concern being faced by Asian churches now is the large-scale migration or exodus of Asian Christians from their respective countries to nations outside the region. Various Christian denominations in different Asian countries are concerned that their young people are migrating to other countries and are not returning. The number of empty nests is increasing, where only the old people are left, and their children are migrating. These days it is easy to move abroad; young people are going first for education and then for employment with the intention to settle elsewhere. A new phenomenon is the emergence of 'assisted

living sectors’—not old age homes. Elderly parents are being financially supported by their children living abroad, and they live comfortable lives instead of staying alone by themselves. The same is the case in Pakistan. Several Christians are looking for opportunities to migrate elsewhere. Two of my former CCA colleagues moved very recently to Europe and North America.

The changing demography and nature of the family in Asia are receiving increasing attention these days. Rapidly ageing societies in Asia, especially East Asia, have resulted in more consideration being paid to issues such as the demand for care workers to assist the elderly. From South Asia, several young Christian people and their families are moving out of their home countries and leaving behind their ancestral land. This is more evident mostly in South and Southeast Asian countries. In some of these countries, congregations have only old people as members. That means, the membership in churches is limited to the elderly. Once-active congregations have become less active or even empty. This exodus of Christians beyond Asia is a matter of serious concern. The services of highly educated Christian youth will no longer be available to their own communities or countries, and this must be seriously reflected upon by churches. The paradox is that while Christian fundamentalist groups engage in aggressive missionary evangelism in the Asian region, they are also at the same time focusing their attention and resources on the elderly, who are switching their membership from their own denominations to some of these para-church groups or free churches that give them greater pastoral assistance. Mainline denominations are simply not providing that level of concern or care.

The last decade has seen an increase not only in the number of Asians moving between nations, but the types of mobility have also become more complex. The reasons which are responsible for this increase in the movement are associated with globalisation, increased levels of education, proliferation of international media, improved transport systems and the internationalisation of business and labour markets. Asia has the largest number of international migrants when compared to any other continent—about 80 million. Between 1990 and 2017 it increased by 31 million, the largest growth in the world (UN, 2017). 89% of this growth could be attributed to intra-continental flows. At the same time most international migrants within Asia had been born in the region. 61 million of the world’s migrants have moved within Asia, making it the largest intra-regional migration flow in the world, according to the UN. Between 1990 and 2000 only three of the top ten bilateral corridors were

within Asia but between 2010 and 2017 that number had increased to six. Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka – have been shaped by major migratory movements, both within the sub-region and globally.

Asia is also a source region of international migration of students. China and India are the largest student-sending countries and account for a significant part of the international outflows of money paid for student fees, much of which flows outside the continent.

### **CCA Headquarters Location and its Future**

The CCA moved its headquarters from Hong Kong to Chiang Mai in 2006. It was at the 2005 Chiang Mai Assembly that a major decision was taken with much hope and enthusiasm to shift the headquarters to Chiang Mai. However, many factors were not in favour of CCA ever since CCA pitched its tent to Chiang Mai from Hong Kong. We must now evaluate whether Chiang Mai should continue to be the place where we should be anchored or located in the coming years. I feel that it is my duty to report to this highest decision-making body the merits and demerits of our being in Chiang Mai, Thailand, especially by evaluating the situation ever since CCA shifted its headquarters from Hong Kong to Chiang Mai in 2006.

In recent months we have been experiencing challenging situations from the Thai Immigration department about our visas, and the changing policies of the Labour department. These are not convincing reasons for us to continue to be based in, or for the headquarters to be located in, Chiang Mai, or even in Thailand.

When it was decided to move out of Hong Kong, immediately they registered the CCA as a legal entity in Thailand, assuming it was the easiest way at that time. Now we are facing lots of problems as the Thai immigration and Thai labour departments are every now and then asking our new recruits to submit monthly reports of activities. They come suddenly or without prior notice to our office to examine such things. Most of the times the overseas staff even cannot communicate with the inspection team due to language barriers. So how long will we continue this kind of practice, especially when staff need to travel and organise programmes outside of Thailand. We also keep the major portion of our funds in Hong Kong Bank accounts and transfer funds to Thailand depending upon our needs. However, now some donors are suggesting

that CCA must have its primary bank accounts in Thailand, not in Hong Kong due to the changing political situation in Hong Kong. These trends are not helpful for CCA as an international organisation as all the funds a Thai organisation receives in Thai banks for use in programmes will have to be converted to the local currency although the currency fluctuations lead to CCA ending up losing money. Moreover, when we need to organise programmes abroad, we will have to buy US dollars, and after the programmes the balance amount must be converted to local currencies. Even though we can have a US dollar account for minimum transactions, lots of risk is involved in withdrawals and deposits in hard currencies and exchanges in local currencies. Conversion and reconversion of currencies will only end up in loss of money for CCA. As the foreign currency needs to be obtained from the head office of the Banks in Bangkok, every time we request any quantum of cash, we require to do so one or two months in advance. Sometimes we postpone or cancel the programmes, but we still have to draw the already requested amount and keep the large sums of money in the office. We are not comfortable keeping large amounts of money in the office. This is the nature of the problem that we are facing. Therefore, I mentioned that it is high time for us to think about where the headquarters location of the CCA must be in future.

I am reminded of one of the statements made by the first CCA General Secretary D.T. Niles. After ten years of CCA's existence, the first General Secretary of CCA presented a report at the Bangkok General Assembly in 1968, he said that our experiences show we have no Switzerland in Asia for CCA to be rooted in a free and fair political atmosphere. Of course, CCA's history has been punctuated with such moves and shifts, from Bangkok to Singapore, then being expelled from Singapore in 1987, then being relocated to different places, in Hong Kong, Osaka, Manila, and Chiang Mai; and then coming together under one roof in Hong Kong. Again, the whole office was shifted to Chiang Mai. Now 16 years after the relocation from Hong Kong to Chiang Mai, we are struggling in Chiang Mai with our normal operations as an international religious organisation in Asia. We must ensure a certain sense of ownership or commitment of our member churches in this regard.

We had ambitious plans and programmes about constructing the CCA headquarters and training institute, which we could even rent out and fetch income. But amidst the changing situation in Thailand, it is getting difficult. This is the reason that last time in the Executive Committee meeting, I mentioned that at the beginning of our term, I had the enthusiasm and ambition to initiate something, and the



Executive Committee had supported that idea. Although it was decided by this ExCom, now I am convinced that we cannot implement those plans. I informed the Executive Committee early this year that I am not that enthusiastic about recommending the construction of a new headquarters for CCA in Thailand. Based on the discussions in the Executive Committee meetings, I have had some informal conversations with some of our member churches. During my visit to the Philippines last time, I discussed this with the leadership of the National Council of Churches in the Philippines (NCCP). I also had some other informal conversations with the church leaders in the Philippines. During the Asian Christian and Ecumenical Leaders' Conference I reported about the situation and subsequently initiated conversations with the Persekutuan Gereja-gereja Indonesia, or the Council of Churches in Indonesia. We have limited options for situating the CCA in a right locality in Asia. Hong Kong is quite expensive, and this was one of the main reasons why we moved from Hong Kong to Thailand. Now Hong Kong has other problems these days even with regard to keeping our bank accounts. The banking system and its restrictions are also difficult to navigate.

It is therefore high time that we begin reflecting on a plan B, plan C, or even plan D. The General Assembly needs to be aware of the situation and this is the reason that I am reporting it here.

### **Sustainability of CCA**

The other matter I want to share with the delegates of the 15<sup>th</sup> General Assembly is about the sustainability of CCA. Asian churches are participating in ecumenical activities more actively these days, and I say this from my experience. I was on the staff of the CCA in the 1990s. I was recruited to work for the CCA when its headquarters was based in Hong Kong and spent seven years there. Then I moved to the World Council of Churches, where part of my responsibility was to coordinate the roundtable meetings, especially those of the CCA, to discuss the sharing of ecumenical resources from Western agencies. I was aware of the amount of money CCA used to get in those days and the amount of support the local churches were giving CCA. From my experience, when I look back on these thirty years of experience in dealing with CCA in different capacities, I can say that churches' involvement and active participation in CCA have increased. The financial support and in-kind contributions Asian member churches provide to CCA also are increasing. At one CCA roundtable meeting in the past, it was noted that Asian churches' contribution was only eight percent, but when it

was estimated four years ago, it was noted that Asian contributions had increased to forty percent. That is why we have been able to survive and organise more programmes. But still, the sixty percent of the income has been coming from outside – whether that will remain the case going forward is the question before us. All indications point to the fact that we cannot simply expect substantial funds in the future from outside of Asia. When CCA completes seventy years of existence in 2027, we need to discuss the kind of ecumenical structure that will persist in Asia, and the sustainability of such a structure in the future and the future of this valuable ecumenical instrument in Asia.

When I started my term as the General Secretary about eight years ago, at the first meeting of the Executive Committee, I summarised the General Secretary's report with a statement that "we need to recover our vision and passion for ecumenism, discerning in the depth of our faith. We need to recognise 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".

Almost eight years later, I can only reiterate the same statement as I feel it is still relevant. What we need is a follow-up. I thank you all profoundly for the support and encouragement we have been receiving from all CCA member churches and councils during the past eight years. May God Almighty bless us all.

29 September, Kottayam

## Report of the Moderator

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*Bishop Dhiloraj Canagasabey*

Distinguished delegates and participants of the 15<sup>th</sup> General Assembly of CCA,

At the very outset let me pay tribute to someone whom we miss seeing today taking my place as the Moderator at this Assembly. He is none other than our beloved leader, the late lamented Archbishop Willem T.P. Simarmata, who was called to eternity in June 2022. Every time we remember him in love, we thank our God for his leadership and passion for the ecumenical movement in the CCA. May his soul rest in peace and rise in glory!

We are gathered here in Kottayam at a time of heightened global unrest, of political, social, and economic crises in several countries in our region, a raging tragic war in Europe with global implications, a frustrating and dangerous sense of hopelessness in the Middle East and a series of tragic events in parts of Africa.

Worrying and critical as these multiple issues are, there is an even greater spectre that overshadows all of them—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 foundations of the creation that God created”. This is of course the catastrophic damage that human greed, arrogance, and violence have inflicted on the health and sustainability of our planet and its eco-system, on which all of life, human and non-human, depend.

Two flashing red lights of recent days should have made this very clear to us, if indeed we needed such warnings. The first was the global COVID-19 pandemic that infected 700 million and killed 7 million persons worldwide within a span of less than 3 years, devastating the lives and economic security of billions. The second is the series of environmental disasters that have battered our planet in recent times, ranging from widespread

# Business Session



From left to right: Dr Mathews George Chunakara, General Secretary; Rt Rev. Dhiloraj Canagasabey, Moderator; Bishop Reuel Norman Marigza, Vice-Moderator; Augustine Dipak Karmakar, Treasurer



Rt Rev. Dhiloraj Canagasabey,  
CCA Moderator



Dr Mathews George Chunakara,  
CCA General Secretary



Augustine Dipak Karmakar,  
CCA Treasurer

Delegates at the Assembly business session





Delegates at the Assembly business session



Delegates at the Assembly business session





## Programme Review Deliberative Sessions



Group 1: General Secretariat; Finance;  
Ecumenical Relationships; and Communications



Group 2: Mission in Unity and Contextual Theology;  
and Ecumenical Leadership Formation and Spirituality



Group 3: Building Peace and Moving Beyond Conflicts;  
and Prophetic Diakonia and Advocacy



## Discussions at Programme Direction Deliberative Sessions



Discussions at Programme Direction Deliberative Sessions





## Programme Direction Deliberative Sessions – Reports



Rev. Tara Tautari,  
Maori Council of Churches in New Zealand



Rev. Terence Corkin,  
Uniting Church in Australia



Saw Dah Eh Bway Doh Htoo,  
Myanmar Baptist Convention



Rev. Jimmy Sormin,  
Gereja Protestan di Indonesia bagian Barat



Rev. Minji Kim,  
National Council of Churches in Korea



Rosiana Indah Purnomo,  
Gereja Kristen Oikoumene Indonesia

and utterly devastating wildfires, unprecedented summer temperatures in the Northern hemisphere, melting glaciers in the South and North Poles, environmental changes that continue to drastically affect the fragile ecosystem that all living things depend upon.

Jesus taught us to pray, “Thy kingdom come on Earth, as it is heaven ....” a prayer that is repeated many million times a day, in churches, homes, and other gatherings. But rarely do we pause to ask ourselves about the implications of this plea and of the heavy challenge it lays upon us as co-partners with God in the work of sustaining the integrity of the creation. Does this call make any impact on our priorities and lifestyles? No wonder the Church has often been accused of merely playing “catch up” behind activists, civil society, and even governments when it comes to matters such as gender equality, child and animal rights, and environmental concerns.

But yet, there is scant justification for such lethargy, either in the light of Jesus’ own attitude towards the role of women and children for example, or in scriptural teachings on the divine imperative to care for all of God’s creation.

Certainly, with regard to the environment, we can draw inspiration from the wonderful teachings and example of the 13<sup>th</sup>-century Christian, Saint Francis, and also the work of many European monasteries in the Middle Ages onwards with their emphasis on nurturing the soil, as well as on the study of genetics.

I thank the General Secretary and the Theme Study Working Group for their excellent work and commend this very comprehensive study document that you will be reflecting on and considering during the next few days during the assembly and even after the assembly in the next few years as this theme is very relevant in the Asian and global contexts and our attention much needed.

Together with the Papal encyclical, “Laudato Si”, the teaching, preaching, and writings of the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, the WCC’s work on the issues of sustainable development spanning many decades, as well as my own church’s emphasis on the “Fifth Mark of Mission” which focusses on ‘threats to the unity of creation’, all offer sound Christian perspectives on this urgent task which lies before us.

In the words of the General Assembly theme, may we be open and respond to the “God who calls us to Renewal in his Spirit so that we may Restore the Creation”.

On a personal note, as I complete my tenure as a member of the Executive Committee and as Acting Moderator of the CCA General Assembly, let me thank profusely our efficient and gifted General Secretary for his leadership, and spiritual drive to set CCA on a focused pilgrimage across the past eight years.

The CCA has implemented numerous programmes during the past eight years, even during the COVID-19 lockdown period. The General Secretary's report which will be presented later and various other printed documents as well as visuals will help us to understand a variety of programmes and activities undertaken and implemented by CCA staff during our tenure and under this Executive Committee's supervision. We are thankful to all those who have accompanied the CCA leadership in their committed work. The Officers greatly acknowledge all those who were part of CCA's ecumenical journey during the past years.

Let me thank the Host Committee and all those who volunteered to work together to make this General Assembly at Kottayam a blessed and memorable ecumenical event. May God Almighty transform the hearts of every person gathered here to become authentic stewards of God's precious creation, which He has given to us in complete trust. May He find us to be trustworthy as we move forward and journey together. I thank you all on behalf of the officers and members of the Executive Committee of the Christian Conference of Asia.

# Report of the Treasurer

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*Augustine Dipak Karmakar*

Respected Moderator, Vice-Moderator, General Secretary, Members of the executive committee, delegates from member churches and councils, distinguished guests, speakers, ecumenical partners, and observers, at the outset, as the Treasurer, I express my heartfelt thanks and profound gratitude to you all.

## **Introduction**

Eight years have passed since we met in Jakarta. With great thanks to God; Almighty God has kept us alive during the pandemic situation. We are at this Assembly at a time when the entire world is feeling the impact of the looming darkness of the COVID-19 pandemic and financial crises. Member churches and councils are affected. Many governments, organisations, and financial institutions are also forced to cut down spending and lending due to the global financial crisis. We have been receiving letters from some ecumenical partners that they are forced to reduce what they give to the CCA. Somebody is saying that they are not able to support us financially but their journey with us will continue. We have been expecting this and therefore it is no surprise to us. It is a call to re-think the way we spend money and to re-reflect the way we want to make our presence in the ecumenical movement in Asia.

I am aware that my task is to present the financial status of the CCA as we gather after eight years. However, I know that the nature of this Assembly is not only about finance. Certainly, finance is very important, but finance should not become the preoccupation of all our deliberations. We, the member churches and councils in our respective countries, are concerned about sharing resources with the CCA and supporting and enhancing the work of the ecumenical movement. We should serve the CCA and show our solidarity with the ecumenical movement. We are co-workers with God for the realisation of kingdom values such as justice, peace, and reconciliation, striving to overcoming violence, to avoid religious conflict,

to show mercy and to act in compassion to free the captives. Therefore, all of us as mutual partners must walk together in solidarity and witness to Jesus Christ who is amidst and within us by word and action. With these introductory remarks, I would like to present the financial status and trend of CCA for the last eight years from 2015–2022.

The financial status and brief reflection of the Financial Statements of last eight years are stated below:

#### **a. Main sources of income**

As we all know, CCA receives its financial income from three sources: annual membership contributions from member churches and councils, contributions from ecumenical partner organisations, as well as other income from individuals, gains from securities, individual contributions, designated contributions from member churches for programmes, publications, subscriptions, etc.

#### **Contribution from member churches and councils**

Membership contributions should have been a very significant financial source of CCA's finances. However, we have not been able to make good progress in raising the contributions from member churches and councils during all these years. As we all know, many organisations could not achieve their targets due to constant problems and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic situation during the year 2020 and 2021. Generally, the financial support of member churches and councils is relatively small. A significant number of churches and councils do not pay their annual contribution, with a few paying but doing so irregularly, while only a small number pay it regularly. As per the decision of the Executive Committee, the General Secretary made special efforts and approached all member churches and councils to increase the regular membership contributions and also the General Secretary has been consistently requesting and approaching churches to host CCA programmes and events at their expense, individual contributions for travel cost by participants and sending sponsored participant as well as contributions to cover local expenses for hosting meetings, seminars etc. Many member churches and councils have enhanced their annual contribution from the year of 2016 due to the above efforts and approach. The normal in-kind support and other facilities provided by the member Churches and Councils have not been increased due to the abnormal pandemic situation of COVID-19 in 2020 and 2021. I hope that the financial and in-kind support of the members churches, councils, and other ecumenical Asian churches increases in the coming years and such in-kind support and facilities must

be converted in terms of money and recorded in the respective books of accounts accordingly. The overall contributions USD 129,889 from member churches and councils of CCA have increased by 2.50% (USD 3,174) in 2022 than the same period of the previous year 2021.

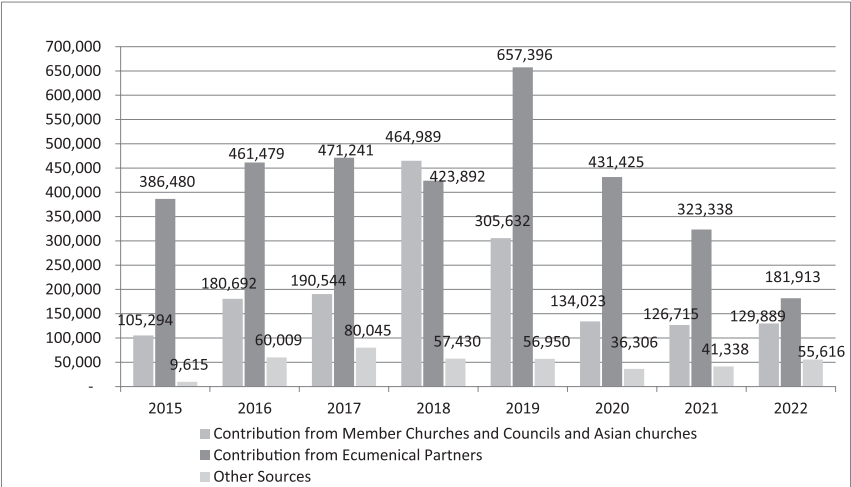
**b. Contribution from Ecumenical Partners**

The major chunk of the source of CCA’s income comes from ecumenical partner organisations from all over the world. It is also a major source of income to cover CCA’s overall budget. In this category of income, the trend is not stable. The income of this category is up and down, but it is still the most significant source of income of CCA. The overall contribution USD 181,913 from ecumenical partners has decreased by 44% (USD 140,425) during the year compared to the previous (2021) contribution USD 322,338, due to impact of COVID-19.

**c. Income from other Sources**

Other sources of income represent the Bank interest, Royalty, Publications, realised income from Investment (dividend) etc. Normally we cannot count the gain/loss on investment in securities as cash income as this is an unrealised income. The overall income from other sources USD 55,576 increased by 35 percent (USD 14,513) during the year 2022 as compared to the previous year’s (2021) Income of USD 41,063. However, a year-wise and head-wise picture of the income of CCA over a period of eight (8) years is as presented below

The following multiple bar diagram gives statistical highlights of major sources of income trends of CCA.





### Sources of Major Income received from 2015-2022

Particulars	Year								Re-marks
	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	
Contributions from Member Churches and Councils & Asian Churches	+19% 21%	+72% 26%	+5% 26%	+144% 49%	-34% 30%	-56% 22%	-5% 26%	+3% 35%	a. Comparison of year wise Negative & positive Trend with corresponding last year.  b. Year wise contribution of the total Income
Contribution from Ecumenical Partner & Organisations	+4% 77%	+19% 66%	+2% 64%	-10% 49%	+55% 64%	-34% 72%	-25% 66%	-44% 50%	Do
Other Sources	-394% 2%	+524% 8%	+33% 10%	-28% 2%	-1% 6%	-36% 6%	+14% 8%	+34% 15%	Do

Year-wise total income (USD 501,389, 702,180, 741,830, 946,311, 1,019,978, 601,754, 491,391, 367,418)

The above bar diagram shows the up and down trends of all categories of income during the last 8 (eight) years. The above Table also represents the year-wise comparison of negative and positive trends with the corresponding last year as well as year-wise percentage of contribution of each category of the total income. Normally we cannot count the gain/loss on investment in securities as cash income, as this is an unrealised income.

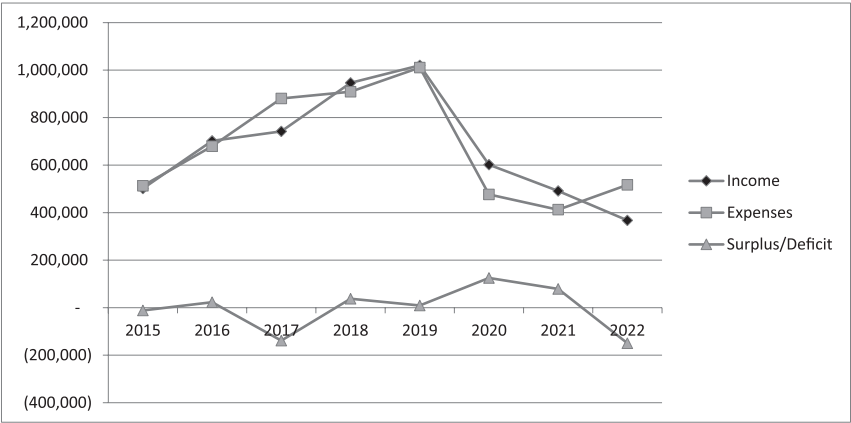
#### d. Income, Expenditure and Surplus/Deficit:

The summary of the year-wise total income, expenditure, and surplus/deficit of CCA over a period of eight years are stated under here:

Particulars	Year							
	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Total Income USD	501,389	702,180	741,830	946,311	1,019,978	601,754	491,391	367,418
Less: Total expenditure USD	513,088	679,179	880,270	908,870	1,010,666	476,504	412,610	517,036
Surplus/Deficit	(11,699)	23,001	(138,440)	37,441	9,312	125,250	78,781	(149,618)

From the above table, the years 2015 and 2017 and 2022 was deficit balance. It means income was less than expenditure and the year 2016 and 2018-2021 was a surplus balance. It indicates the excess income over expenditure, we need to bear in mind that item exchange Gain/(loss) on investment in securities and fixed assets written off are still on papers. The below graph representing the year wise comparative total income, expenditure and surplus/deficit are as follows:

**Income, Expenses and Surplus/Deficit**



The above graph represents the up and down trends of actual income, actual expenditure and surplus/deficit for the period from 2015 to 2022.

In the year 2022 total income was lower than that of the year 2021 because considerably less funds were received from the ecumenical partners & organisations, but total expenditure was higher than the year 2021. As per statement of income and expenditure USD 149,618 is showing as expenditure over income after adjusting USD 150,000 from designated fund against total expenditure on cash basis.

**Strategic Programme and Financial Plan - Year 2023**

We appreciate the concern of the ecumenical Churches and partners organisations and Member Councils and Churches over the programmes and budget of CCA. We have experienced sincerity and positive response and support from our ecumenical Churches and partner organisations over the years. According to that, CCA has been constructively and strategically planning and implementing its programmes and by efficient budget and utilisation. Presently CCA has allocated the budget for GS, MU, EF, BP, and PD.

Total income budget for 2023 is USD 1,805,000 against total expenditure budget, which is USD 1,796,381 including CCA 15<sup>th</sup> General Assembly – 2023. The budget is allocated to GS USD 169,732, MU USD 331,155, EF USD 181,806, BP USD 239,775, and PD USD 292,711. All these include CCA General Assembly Pre-events and 15<sup>th</sup> General Assembly USD 419,000, contribution to special project ATCHAA is USD 20,000, Auditors remuneration USD 10,000, allocated to Communication, Co-ordination, Editors & Web editors, Website/ CCA News and IT USD 109,535 and income Development USD 22,000 as per budget – 2023.

Although this budget line was approved by the Finance Committee and EC, the expenditure is strictly controlled by the General Secretary according to the income received. At the same time, you may think about what the source for more income is. If we want to raise more funds, we need also to have a proper plan for staff, programmes, and income generation. If the fund is not available, it does not mean that the budgeted amount will be spent, rather we should think about how we can raise/adjust the deficit budget if any for the year 2023 and 2024.

As per the strategic programme plan, CCA is also focusing on fundraising with continuous efforts, team building and strategy. CCA is also focusing on financial strengthening and financial planning for the year 2023 and 2024.

We are happy to notice that CCA is trying its best to gradually improve its financial conditions through the funds generated within Asia through its member churches and councils. Yet we still need to be cautious as we realise the ongoing trend of decreased income, which will have a further impact on CCA in the near future, unless CCA finds other sources of income within Asia.

It is clear that although there is an increased contribution from member churches and councils, yet that level of increase cannot make up for the decrease in the support of the funding partners in the near future. The COVID-19 situation has impacted us in different ways including reduced contributions from our ecumenical partners as well as member churches and councils. This matter has to be addressed urgently, especially on how to fill up the gap.

We need to generate more income to achieve financial sustainability as well as maintain a comfortable size of reserve fund. Otherwise, financially CCA would experience a crisis in income cash flow, especially due to the fact that: (1) the annual contribution of member churches and councils

## Moments of Worship



Evening worship service at Jerusalem Mar Thoma Church



Five participants, each representing an element—water, sky, fire, air, and earth—step forward with symbolic items, inviting the gathering to dream in harmony with creation



Seven representatives labelled with words form a symbolic house of unity, guided by the One who brings them together in harmony



In a morning prayer





Morning worship focusing on water as a symbol of God's life-giving love and care



Participants sharing the light of Christ during evening prayer



Delegates participating in worship





## Ecumenical Partners' Greetings



Patricia Kathryn Talbot,  
United Church of Canada



Dn. Kerry Ruth Scarlett,  
Churches Together in Britain and Ireland



Metropolitan Sevryuk Anton,  
Russian Orthodox Church Moscow Patriarchate



Sheila Avril Norris,  
Methodist Church in UK





Rev. Jieun Kim Han,  
Presbyterian Church USA



Rev. Frida Falk,  
Church of Sweden



Rev. Dr. Risto Jukko,  
Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland



Dr. Sarosh Koshy, Global Ministries  
Disciples of Christ and United Church of Christ USA



Most Rev. Francis Serrao,  
Federation of Asian Bishops' Conference



Yowanda Yongarra,  
World Student Christian Federation



Representatives from Russian Orthodox Church, Coptic Orthodox Church,  
and National Council of Churches in Australia



Participants from the churches in Republic of Korea



## D.T. Niles Memorial Lecture



Dayabai, Indian social activist, delivering the D.T. Niles Memorial Lecture



is still low and mostly paid irregularly, and (2) the contributions from ecumenical partners are decreasing gradually due to global economic recession. The contributions from ecumenical partners are also received mostly towards the last quarter of the year.

### **Update on CCA investment in Hong Kong**

CCA invested most of the funds in Hong Kong in the form of securities, bonds, and listed shares, etc. They oversee CCA investment in Hong Kong. Exchange gain or loss and gain or loss on investment in securities are shown in the financial statements. These gains or losses represent an increase or decrease in the market value of the investment on the last day of the reporting period. The actual gain or loss will be realised only after the actual sale of the investment.

### **How to move together towards self-reliance**

In order to move towards CCA self-reliance, the CCA members need to review their commitment to continue our journey together to respond to the ecumenical challenges in Asia today. The CCA was born in Prapat in 1957 and the “concept of life together” and “coming together” emerged. As D.T. Niles said “life together” demands that churches in East Asia accept that they belong to one another and we are willing increasingly to live a shared life.

This is a challenge for us as members of the CCA. Especially in this General Assembly 2023, we have to seriously discuss how to move together towards self-reliance of CCA. How can we encourage the CCA members, especially in our respective contexts to send their annual contributions regularly to CCA? We should be moved together towards self-reliance by increasing members’ annual contributions, helping in hosting programmes, meetings, and individual travel costs, and contribution to local expenses as a sign of sharing life and resources like own labour, talents, money, and facilities to enhance the CCA ministry. The offer of member churches and councils to host the CCA General Assembly 2023 is a clear example. This is one of the practical strategies, ways, and means to attain financial self-reliance. Now I would like to propose a few possible ways and means to attain financial self-reliance and reduce dependence on ecumenical partners.

1. Preparing an action plan for raising funds for CCA and increasing the involvement of member churches and councils.
2. Involve NCCs more in each country.

3. Request churches to host more programmes, meetings and sharing of resources.
4. Build up strong relationships with member churches, councils, confessional bodies and world ecumenical organisations.
5. Ecumenical relationships, partnerships and solidarity have to be re-visited in the light of these realities and affirmed, nurtured, empowered and encouraged.
6. Membership fees can be collected much more than what we get now. This has to be addressed by writing letters regularly to remind members of their obligations and following it up with personal visit to member churches.
7. To invest the available CCA resources, endowment fund and reserve fund in the highest profitable investment scheme.
8. US 1 (one) Cent Theory: It is my personal thought and idea. This one-cent theory may be applied for achieving the self-reliance of CCA. The thought and idea of the US 1 (one) cent theory is how much we will get if each member contributes 1 (one) cent per annum. We are talking of a membership of 55-60 million Christians, so numerically it is very easy to calculate that it amounts to USD 550,000-600,000. USD 550,000-600,000 which will almost cover the total cost of general and administrative expenses against a present budget of USD 300,000 (approx.) of General Fund (GF) other than core programmes in 2023 and surplus amount if any may be utilised for the other programme and activities of the CCA. This idea is put toward in order to encourage you to think that we need a practical strategy to collect money from Christians in Asia. Our hope and aspiration is to achieve self-reliance of the churches and CCA in our Asian context to make our dream become reality. We should take some steps and initiatives to achieve self-reliance of CCA within next seven years (2023-2030) and at the same time we should be reducing our dependency on partners step by step, otherwise the ecumenical partners will ask critical questions directly like: when will Asian Churches take responsibility for the ecumenical movement or how long must ecumenical partners or European Churches support CCA and Asian churches? The sun greets the world with love and care. We the people of Asia will rely on the power of GOD that empowers us through relationship with people and the nature around us and examine deeply the realities in our churches and societies. Hence, I would like to invite all of you to participate actively in our movement for achieving self-reliance of our member churches and councils in Asia and CCA.

## **Concluding Remarks**

I am sure, CCA will be able to make a difference in the coming years in terms of fundraising through increased contributions from member churches and councils as well as all CCA partners around the world, in spite of the impact of COVID-19 and disrupted situations like global economic recession, unstable geo-political situation, etc.

Finally, I would like to take this opportunity to express my sincere thanks and gratitude to Dr Mathews George Chunakara, our General Secretary, for his full cooperation and continuous support to me in performing my responsibilities smoothly. I am very much grateful to all members of the finance committee, all finance staff, and programme coordinators and consultants for their cooperation and active participation in different ways. We keep receiving various suggestions every time the finance committee meets. Especially, I thank all members of the executive committee and members of the last Assembly for their confidence in me and for encouraging me to do the work entrusted to me as the Treasurer of CCA for the last five years. Last, I thank all members of this Assembly, observers, volunteers, guests, and speakers for your patience in hearing.

Peace and blessings to all of you.

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## Assembly Statements

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### 1. Australia's First Peoples' Voice

*"If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one is honoured, every part rejoices with it.*

*Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it."*

*(1 Corinthians 12:26–27)*

As an expression of the unity of churches and councils of Asia, the CCA General Assembly affirms that we are together the Body of Christ. When one part of the body is in pain, the whole body shares in and experiences the pain. We hear the cry and feel the pain of the First Peoples of Australia and in all parts of Asia. We have been guided in making this statement by Indigenous Australians who are part of the Assembly.

We recognise that the struggles faced by indigenous peoples are not confined by geographical borders, but are universal in their call for recognition, empowerment, and reconciliation. In this spirit of solidarity and faith, the 15<sup>th</sup> General Assembly of the Christian Conference of Asia presents this statement on the issue of Australia's First Peoples referendum and voice, reaffirming our unwavering commitment to accompanying the indigenous peoples of Asia and beyond on their collective journey towards justice and reconciliation.

Australians will vote on 14 October on whether to amend the Australian constitution to:

- Recognise Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, the indigenous peoples of Australia, in Australia's 122-year-old constitution as being the first peoples of Australia; and
- Establish a Voice, an advisory committee of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people that would give advice to the parliament and the Australian government about matters that affect indigenous Australians' lives, so that governments make better decisions.



The CCA, as a movement that strives for the flourishing of all peoples, including the rights of, and justice for, indigenous peoples, and is sensitised to the impact of colonialism, especially on First Nations people, affirms that the proposed Voice is a request from the Uluru Statement from the Heart, which is a gracious invitation from indigenous Australians to all other Australians to walk together in seeking to empower Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders in their own lands, and notes that:

- Action is long overdue in Australia: which is one of the few settler-colonised countries in the world lacking a national treaty with its First Nations; and
- Australia is a nation that officially observes a date marking the arrival of settler-colonisers as the celebratory day of its national foundation. Australia Day is a solemn and traumatic day for indigenous Australians and all those in solidarity with them and in this way this disregards 65,000+ years of living, continuous cultures.

We, the churches in Asia, together with member churches in Australia that include Indigenous Australians as well as peoples in solidarity with all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders:

- Urge the Asian Diaspora in Australia to support the Uluru Statement from the Heart and to vote in favour of enshrining a Voice to Parliament for the First Peoples of the land now called Australia;
- Encourage CCA member constituencies and organisations to continue raising awareness and engagement among their local communities, especially those with links to Australia, in relation to the ongoing struggle for indigenous Australians' self-determination; and
- Encourage the CCA to continue to stand in solidarity with First Peoples and indigenous peoples across Asia.

## **2. Exploitative Extraction of Natural Resources leading to Environmental Crises and Forcible Displacement**

The 15<sup>th</sup> General Assembly of the Christian Conference of Asia is deeply concerned by the pervasive issue of extractive exploitation and exploitative business practices that continue to afflict indigenous communities across Asia. Indigenous peoples, stewards of their lands for generations, face exploitation by profit-focused industries. This cycle harms their well-being, dignity, and justice, causing human rights violations, forcible displacement, and environmental degradation.

The 15<sup>th</sup> CCA General Assembly affirms that every person, regardless of their ethnicity and background, deserves to live in a world where their rights are respected, their cultures celebrated, and their land safeguarded. The exploitation of natural resources should never come at the cost of human rights, and businesses must be held accountable for their actions.

The crisis of ecology in Indonesia: In Indonesia, the crisis of ecology is correlated to the impact of investment by mining companies. Several islands in Indonesia, such as Papua, Kalimantan, Sulawesi, Maluku (Ceram, Buru, Tanimbar) and North Maluku (Obi) are tropical forests. For a long time, the struggle in Indonesia was against deforestation and land grabbing. However, the threat today is the impact of investments in mining companies' groups in several islands. Forcible displacement and relocations are becoming commonplace, occurring already in Rempang, Riau island and in Kawai, Obi island, home to the Tobelo and Galela tribes. In the name of national strategic projects, local indigenous people who have lived on the land for thousands of years are forced to relocate to another faraway place. This uprooting causes the loss of their homes and homelands, and their cultural rights. At the new location, they must restart their lives from scratch, learning to adapt in new resettlements, with limited access, as companies continue their exploitative endeavours. On Yamdena island, the Tanimbar people have been forced to sell their land at below the selling price. Their land is being chipped away, as company expansions require large areas of land. As a result, the poverty of indigenous peoples will become an eternal and permanent fact in mining areas.

Indigenous communities, as the custodians of their ancestral lands, offer us profound lessons in harmonious co-existence with nature. The struggles of indigenous people across Asia against exploitation are a testament to the ongoing battle for justice and equality. As the 15<sup>th</sup> General Assembly of the Christian Conference of Asia, we recognise that their fight is our fight, for the gospel calls us to advocate for the marginalised, protect the vulnerable, and seek righteousness in all corners of the world.

In light of the Assembly theme, "God, Renew Us in Your Spirit and Restore the Creation", it is paramount for churches to actively advocate against unjust business practices and to re-examine their relationships with the broader economic and corporate landscape. Our faith compels us to embody the principles of justice, compassion, and ethical stewardship, not only within our congregations but also in the broader world. By

speaking out against exploitative practices and standing in solidarity with the indigenous peoples of Asia and their struggles, we reaffirm our commitment to a world where human dignity, justice, and environmental sustainability are cherished above profit margins.

### **3. 70 Years After the Armistice: A Statement for Reconciliation and Peace on the Korean Peninsula**

*Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.  
(Matthew 5:9)*

The 15<sup>th</sup> General Assembly of the Christian Conference of Asia (CCA) expresses deep concern that the entire Korean Peninsula is under a seemingly unending threat of war and escalation of conflict, imperilling the strong desire for just, durable, and lasting peace. The strength-for-strength stance of the South and the North perpetuates military tensions on the Korean Peninsula and throughout Northeast Asia. Recently, South Korea, the United States, and Japan have held large-scale military exercises, and the North has responded with missile tests. The lines of confrontation on the Korean Peninsula are becoming clearer. We pray that the cycle of conflict and tension may be broken and that there will be a move toward the path of peace.

27 July 2023 marked the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the armistice this year. We are reminded once again that the Korean War is not over; peace is imperfect and war can break out at any time. On this 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the armistice, we fervently pray for true peace on the Korean Peninsula.

Relations between North and South Korea have deteriorated significantly since the failure of the 2019 summit in Hanoi, Vietnam. In June 2020, the Joint Inter-Korean Liaison Office was demolished and communication lines were cut. With the northern border closure since the pandemic, communication between the two Koreas has been cut off, and there has been no meeting with the Korea Christian Federation (KCF) since December 2019. In this desperate situation, we fervently pray that relations with our sisters and brothers in the KCF will be restored and that a time will come when Christians from the North and the South will worship together.

To break the cycle of conflict, tension, and escalating confrontation on the Korean Peninsula, a strong decision to move from a declaration of war to a peace agreement is needed. The current confrontation on the Korean Peninsula is not the right choice for the future, as it will only increase armaments and the social costs of tension. Treating others with violence

and antagonism is never God's way. The transition from an armistice to a peace agreement reflects the common desire of the National Council of Churches in Korea (NCCCK) and the Korean Christian Federation (KCF).

Therefore, the 15<sup>th</sup> CCA General Assembly calls for an official end to the Korean War, prays for a peace agreement to replace the 1953 Armistice, and:

- Invites all CCA constituencies to worship together for peace on the Korean Peninsula on the second week of August each year using the worship liturgy and prayer of the "North-South Joint Prayer for Peace and Reunification on the Korean Peninsula".
- Calls upon CCA constituencies and the wider ecumenical community to actively participate in the Korea Peace Appeal, a campaign to achieve total peace in the Peninsula by 2025, being led by the NCCCK.
- Strongly encourages an easement of the sanctions on North Korea, currently a major obstacle to civilian exchange, cooperation, and political dialogue with the people of North Korea. We also urge, along with representatives of the global ecumenical community, that substantive civilian exchanges between Christians in North and South Korea be quickly resumed.
- Calls upon the governments involved to refrain from provocative statements and military actions that escalate confrontation and tensions and to create instead an environment of reconciliation and dialogue for peace on the Korean Peninsula.
- Prays that the permanent members of the UN Security Council continue to work together for reconciliation and peace on the Korean Peninsula.

#### **4. "Let Peace Be the Imperative, Not the Alternative": Concern about Increasing Militarisation in Asia**

*"For he himself is our peace, who has made the two groups one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility..."*  
(Ephesians 2:14)

As a fundamental tenet of our faith, we recognise Jesus as the Prince of Peace. With this acknowledgement, the 15<sup>th</sup> General Assembly of the Christian Conference of Asia (CCA) is deeply troubled by the alarming surge in militarisation and the frenzied arms race sweeping across Asia. The signs are unmistakable—from military parades in the Korean Peninsula to contentious territorial disputes and cross-strait tensions

in the South China Sea and the East Sea, territorial disputes between neighbouring countries in South Asia, Southeast Asia, and other parts of Asia, and the growing military presence of various nations, including the United States, in the region.

The repercussions of this arms escalation are profound and far-reaching. It is not confined merely to geopolitical or economic concerns; it affects the very fabric of our societies. Indigenous communities, women, children, and those already living in poverty within these regions bear the cost of this militarisation. Billions of dollars that could be redirected to address pressing issues, like hunger and poverty, are instead squandered on building up vast arsenals. This diversion of resources is exacerbated by the onslaught of neoliberalism and cutthroat competition among affluent nations, which exploit economically vulnerable countries in Asia and inflict devastating consequences on their people. The environment suffers and precious resources that communities rely on for their livelihoods, such as fishing and agriculture, are depleted.

The spectre of increasing militarisation looms ominously in places like Myanmar and the Philippines, where human rights are at grave risk. In light of these urgent concerns, the 15<sup>th</sup> CCA General Assembly:

- Calls upon the CCA constituencies to actively engage in addressing this critical issue. Collaboration with churches in the affected countries and assistance with programme development and advocacy initiatives are vital steps forward.
- Urges the CCA itself to forge partnerships with other ecumenical bodies and international entities that share our concerns, as this collective strength will amplify our advocacy efforts.
- Urges the CCA to continue to monitor and assess the escalating militarisation in Asia, providing guidance to member churches in their advocacy endeavours.
- Implores the CCA constituencies to take proactive steps in supporting vulnerable communities, who often lack a voice in these matters; Peacebuilding, in our context, means prioritising essentials like food over arms, fostering job opportunities rather than dependencies, and championing justice while mitigating exploitation.

‘Let Peace be the Imperative, Not the Alternative’<sup>1</sup> is a calling deeply rooted in our faith and conscience. As followers of the Prince of Peace, let us steadfastly uphold the imperative of peace, working tirelessly to transform it from an alternative to a living reality for all.

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<sup>1</sup> Phrase attributed to Rev. Dr Liberato Bautista

## 5. Creation Care

The 15<sup>th</sup> General Assembly of the Christian Conference of Asia has focussed its attention on the theme ‘God, Renew Us in Your Spirit, and Restore the Creation’.

Rev. Dr Jerry Pillay, the General Secretary of the World Council of Churches in his keynote address described the:

*... polycrisis that is prevalent in the world today. Hunger, poverty, economic discrepancies, inequalities, ethnic, political, religious and gender violence, to name a few. Countries all over the world are riddled with conflicts, factions and tensions. We are living in the context of war. In the Asian context, there are the challenges of migration, human trafficking, religious fundamentalism, struggles of minority faith communities and the quest and protection of religious freedom, among the other things mentioned of global concerns. There is a struggle for peace and justice that affects the stable order of societies and threatens creation at large.*

We focused not only on the crises being faced but also gave attention to the prayer ‘God renew us in your Spirit and Restore Creation’. Thematic speakers and Bible Studies leaders from across Asia have helped us reflect on the ways that churches and people of faith can engage in the work of transformation and restoration.

We invite the member churches and councils to continue to give increased priority to advocacy and strategies that directly address the sources of the polycrisis being faced, by:

- Educating and equipping member churches and councils to understand and appreciate the crises being faced.
- Developing resources that encourage, support, and build hope for those directly affected by the crisis we are all in – experiencing the struggle for peace and justice.
- Advocating for actions and strategies that can be implemented locally in ways that renew people in God’s Spirit and so seek to restore creation.

*As followers of Jesus Christ, we realise that our hope and trust is in the Triune God, who continues to inspire and call us to be agents of hope. The restoration of creation happens only with a renewed Spirit, leading to a metanoia (transformation) in the hearts, minds, and actions of people and communities. That will assist us to reconcile and live in harmony with each other and our environments.*

## 6. Human Dignity and Wholeness of Life

Health, healing, and wholeness of life are fundamental aspects of affirming human dignity in a comprehensive and holistic manner. These dimensions are interconnected and contribute significantly to the overall well-being of individuals, communities, and societies. The 15<sup>th</sup> General Assembly reaffirms its unwavering commitment to upholding the inherent dignity and wholeness of life for every individual, recognising that each person is created in the image of God and is deserving of respect, love, and care. Health, healing, and wholeness are central to God's divine grace and purpose for humanity, which involves a harmonious living-in-community with God, people, and the entire creation. The Church can play a greater role in witnessing and participating creatively in the divine ministry of healing, restoring wholeness in broken human lives with compassion, and being one with our Lord in His self-emptying and unconditional love. In this spirit, we acknowledge the need to address sensitive issues specifically pertaining to disability, mental health, geriatric and palliative care, and sexual and reproductive health within our diverse communities.

The 15<sup>th</sup> CCA General Assembly:

- Highlights the importance of health ministries and encourages CCA constituencies to support initiatives that prioritise the needs of vulnerable and marginalised populations, encourage partnerships between faith-based healthcare providers and public healthcare systems, and promote health education and preventive measures within congregations.
- Acknowledges the silent struggles many individuals face in relation to mental health and encourages the CCA constituencies to foster open dialogue on mental health to reduce stigma, develop support networks within congregations, educate clergy and congregations about mental health issues, and establish outreach, education, and rehabilitation programmes on the risks of substance abuse or addictions.
- Recognises the unique challenges faced by persons with disabilities and asks the CCA constituencies to commit to ensuring inclusive access to places of worship and community spaces, promote the full participation of persons with disabilities in church life, advocate for the rights and dignity of persons with disabilities, and collaborate with disability advocacy organisations to amplify the voices of persons with disabilities.
- Acknowledges the needs of our ageing populations and encourages CCA constituencies to pledge to advocate for quality geriatric and palliative care within church-run healthcare systems and wider healthcare systems, train and equip caregivers to provide compassionate care to the elderly, promote community support



for older adults to combat isolation, and advocate for policies that safeguard the rights and dignity of older individuals.

- Understands the significance of sexual and reproductive health and encourages CCA constituencies to commit to providing comprehensive sexual and reproductive health education within faith communities, advocate for access to affordable and quality healthcare services, and foster a culture of compassion and understanding on issues related to sexuality and reproduction. The situation merits comprehensive responses, including the possibility of conversations on human sexuality with those churches and councils that are open to it.
- Recognises the diversity of families and the importance of family well-being, and encourages CCA constituencies to provide resources and guidance for building strong, loving, and supportive families, offer counselling and support for families facing challenges, promote gender equality and protection of women's and children's rights within families and so address issues including domestic violence, and advocate for policies supporting work-life balance and family-friendly workplaces.
- Encourages all member churches and councils to implement and promote safeguarding practices which demonstrate strong commitments to ensuring the protection of children and vulnerable people participating in church activities. These practices may be assisted by appointing safeguarding leads to manage them. Having safeguarding policies endorsed and affirmed as being at a high standard by non-governmental and/or international organisations gives confidence to both the organisation and participants.
- Assess and, if necessary, change the existing legal frameworks, reporting mechanisms and support services so that they are survivor-informed.
- Incorporate safeguarding as a theme and focus when conferences are planned and ensure that participants are informed as to the CCA safeguarding policies and procedures.

## **7. Public Debt**

The 15<sup>th</sup> CCA General Assembly notes with concern the debt trap that has led Sri Lanka to declare bankruptcy, giving rise to a serious political and economic crisis in the country.

The debt restructuring process now adopted through the International Monetary Fund, is resulting in enormous burdens on the poorer and vulnerable sections of its people, leading to an increase in poverty, malnutrition, hunger, and the loss of traditional means of livelihood, while escalating violence and crime. It is also directly resulting in the

introduction of draconian laws to crush any form of genuine dissent, curbing the freedom of association and expression.

While we recognise that bad governance and wilful corruption of decision-makers have significantly contributed to this sad plight, Sri Lanka stands as a clear example of the ill effects of the debt crisis which is beginning to affect many vulnerable countries in Asia.

Therefore, the 15<sup>th</sup> CCA General Assembly calls upon the CCA and its constituent members:

- To undertake a serious study of the modern-day debt crisis and its devastating impact in Asia along with the biblical principles of “the year of jubilee and the Nazareth Manifesto”.
- To initiate and advocate appropriate processes to prevail upon the countries that have provided such loans, to seriously consider debt cancellation, which alone will enable the people of such nations to emerge from such crisis within a democratic space that ensures their dignity.
- To bring together Churches facing such similar and unfortunate situations to learn from each other and adopt appropriate ways and means to address the genuine needs of impoverished people while parallelly advocating for the upholding of human rights and dignity and creating a genuine democratic environment.
- To encourage Churches from affluent nations to embark on a strategised plan to advocate for debt cancellation.

## **8. Human Trafficking and Forced Migration**

The scourge of human trafficking is a form of modern-day slavery. It is an affront to God’s gift of human dignity to every human being. The biblical truth compels churches and the ecumenical family to recognise every person, including those in situations of forced migration, as a full bearer of the inherent likeness of God and the dignity that this implies (Gen 1:27). Also, that each person bears the fundamental human right ‘to life, liberty and security’ and that “no one shall be held in slavery or servitude.” (UDHR Articles 3 and 4).

In Asia, we see human beings caught in the vicious cycle of victimization under conditions of forced migration, especially human trafficking in all its forms: trafficking in labour, drugs, human organs, sex, baby-selling, and mail-order brides. Asia has the highest number of human trafficking cases in the world, with South and Central Asia accounting for an estimated 50 million victims. Increasingly, Asia is becoming a flashpoint for the forced coercion of people, including children, through the acquisition of sexual images for circulation through the internet’s pornographic channels and websites.

Human trafficking thrives under conditions of widespread poverty, uneven development of economies, and varied forms of violence, including sexual and domestic violence. In Asia, people have also “been forced to flee their homelands due to ongoing wars and conflicts, climate change, including environmental disasters arising from extractive practices that have rendered both the planet and the people vulnerable,” and many have become “hapless victims of complex nation-state relations who have been rendered stateless”.

Forced migration, including trafficking in and smuggling of persons, is aided and abetted by (a) migrant-sending governments whose labour-export programmes are deemed a solution to underdevelopment and (b) migrant-receiving governments whose demand for cheap labour often leads to exploitation by unscrupulous recruiters and employers for greed and lucrative profit.

It is in this spirit that CCA, as a fulcrum of ecumenical cooperation and response in Asia, calls on its member churches and councils to:

- Become places of welcome, healing and hospitality for victims of human trafficking, providing places of sanctuary, legal support, emergency funds, and medical and psychological support,
- Engage governmental policy-making bodies (parliaments and congress) to enact laws and policies that eradicate human trafficking and eliminate the conditions under which forced migration thrive,
- Take an active role in educating local congregations and their local communities on the reality of human trafficking and forced migration in its many diverse form,
- Provide forums and venues wherein the stories, and voice and agency of human beings victimised by trafficking may be heard and their hidden oppression revealed,
- Engage in advocacy and lobbying through international and national networks to ensure that all forms of human trafficking are addressed by governments and their legal, judicial systems.
- Take seriously the Statement of the Pre-Assembly Forum on Asian Ecumenical Migrants Advocacy Network, titled ‘The Rights and Dignity of Asian Migrant Workers in the Diaspora’.

## **9. Ending Human Rights Violations in the Philippines**

*“When all the prisoners of the land are crushed under foot, when justice is perverted in the presence of the Most High, when one’s case is subverted—does the Lord not see it?”  
(Lamentations 3:34-36)*

The 15<sup>th</sup> General Assembly of the Christian Conference of Asia expresses grave concern over reports from our siblings in Christ in the Philippine

churches regarding the unabated human rights violations (HRVs) under a worsening climate of impunity in their country.

The extrajudicial killings related to the war on illegal drugs that claimed thousands of lives during the term of Pres. Rodrigo Duterte continues under his successor, Pres. Ferdinand Marcos Jr. The University of the Philippines' Third World Studies reported more than 300 drug-related killings during the first year of the Marcos Jr. administration, which began on 30 June 2022. It has also refused to cooperate with the International Criminal Court (ICC).

Since the 2017 termination of peace negotiations between the Government of the Republic of the Philippines (GRP) and the National Democratic Front of the Philippines (NDFP), red-tagging<sup>2</sup> and other HRVs in relation to the counter-insurgency programme also increased.

The US-based Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED) reported that the Armed Forces of the Philippines' counter-insurgency campaign has been accompanied by acts of violence targeting civilians, particularly in the context of red-tagging. Nearly 50 violent events<sup>3</sup> related to the red-tagging of civilians have been recorded between 2020 and 30 June 2023, and 13 of these events took place after Pres. Marcos Jr. took power.

Moreover, the Marcos Jr. administration is using the Anti-Terrorism Law (ATL) and the Anti-Terrorism Financing Act (ATFA) against human rights defenders across sectors, including churches and faith-based groups that have historically worked for social justice as an expression of their faith. Two pastors from the United Church of Christ in the Philippines (UCCP) and a lay leader from the Iglesia Filipina Independiente are currently detained; while two pastors, one from UCCP and one from the United Methodist Church, are facing trumped-up charges on violations of the ATL. Several faith-based organisations also face charges based on alleged violations of the ATFA.

These rampant rights violations have contributed to the shrinking of civic space in the country. It is in this context that the Christian Conference of Asia calls on its member churches and councils to express their solidarity with our Christian siblings and the Filipino people:

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<sup>2</sup> Red-tagging is the act of labelling, branding, naming, and accusing individuals and/or organisations of being left-leaning, subversives, communists, or terrorists (used as) a strategy ... by State agents, particularly law enforcement agencies and the military, against those perceived to be 'threats' or 'enemies of the State'.

<sup>3</sup> These events include those where a person is physically harmed or killed.

- by calling on the Philippine government to stop the killings related to the “war against drugs,” re-accede to the Rome Statute of the ICC and cooperate with its investigation;
- in appeals to scrap the counter-insurgency programme that targets human rights defenders, including church people; and resume the Peace Negotiations between the Government of the Republic of the Philippines and the National Democratic Front of the Philippines; and
- through solidarity visits to the Philippines, where they can learn for themselves the impacts of the human rights violations and the work churches and Christians do in response.

## **10. Situation in Nagorno Karabakh**

The 15<sup>th</sup> General Assembly of the Christian Conference of Asia (CCA) urges the immediate lifting of the blockade of Nagorno-Karabakh, an Armenian enclave in the South Caucasus in central Asia, currently facing a dire humanitarian crisis affecting more than 120,000 individuals, including 30,000 children.

The 15<sup>th</sup> CCA General Assembly is deeply concerned about the worsening humanitarian situation within the blockaded Nagorno-Karabakh region, also known as Artsakh. As the crisis reaches critical levels, the 15<sup>th</sup> CCA General Assembly emphasises the urgent need for immediate action from the global community.

The 15<sup>th</sup> CCA General Assembly strongly condemns Azerbaijan’s blockade of the ethnic Armenian region of Nagorno-Karabakh, and denounces it as a violation of international agreements, humanitarian and human rights principles, and moral standards. The deliberate obstruction of the Lachin corridor exacerbates an already dire situation for its Armenian residents. Such actions contradict the claims of goodwill and humanitarian responsibility made by Azerbaijan, underscoring the urgent need for international attention.

The 15<sup>th</sup> CCA General Assembly urges the international community to promptly intervene in order to dismantle the blockade and safeguard the lives of those residing in Artsakh. The 15<sup>th</sup> CCA General Assembly calls for dialogue and diplomatic initiatives to establish just and lasting peace in the region.

## Asian Ecumenical Festival and Public Meeting



Kerala Chief Minister Mr Pinarayi Vijayan inaugurating Asian Ecumenical Festival



Participants at the Asian Ecumenical Festival







Chief Minister of Kerala greeting the dignitaries



Release of CCA General Secretary's book *Ecumenism in Asia* (second edition) by Rev. Prof. Dr Jerry Pillay



Kerala Government Minister Mr. V.N. Vasavan (middle) releases a commemorative volume on the Assembly; others in the picture Prof. John Mathew (editor), His Eminence Joseph Mor Gregorios, CCA Vice Moderator Bishop Reuel Norman Marigza





Audience at AEF



CCA General Secretary welcomes AEF attendees



Kerala Chief Minister Mr Pinarayi Vijayan with  
CCA General Secretary Dr Mathews George Chunakara

## Asian Ecumenical Festival Cultural Performances



Korean participants performing Cultural Song - *Arirang*



*Thiruvathirakkali* – a festival folk dance in Kerala



Performance by students of Asian Ecumenical Institute-2023





Solo Fusion Dance by a delegate



*Parunthattam*  
(Eagle's dance) – an indigenous ritual folk dance



*Mohiniyattam* – a classical dance of India



Dance by college students



Dance by AEI students



Muthuvan community's tribal dance, CSI East Kerala



Dynamic Action Cultural Team performing  
People's country song on Eco Spirituality



Dramatic performance by Indonesian delegates



Indonesian participants performing Cultural Song



Margamkali – an ancient cultural performance  
of the St Thomas Christian community





Assembly participants celebrating the Asia Ecumenical Festival together



Crowd joining the dancing at the AEF



Crowd joining the dancing at the AEF



Crowd joining the dancing at the AEF



Crowd joining the dancing at the AEF



Crowd joining the dancing at the AEF

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## Pre-Assembly Statements

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### Statement of the Asian Ecumenical Youth Pre-Assembly (AEYA)

**‘We Have a Vision of Heaven on Earth’  
26–28 September 2023 | Vimalagiri, Kottayam, India**

*“But the Lord said to me, ‘Do not say, ‘I am too young.’ You must go to everyone I send you to and say whatever I command you. Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you and will rescue you,” declares the Lord.” (Jeremiah 1:7-8)*

We, ecumenical youth from different countries in Asia, gathered for the Asian Ecumenical Youth Assembly (AEYA) organised by the Christian Conference of Asia in the city of Kottayam in India’s Kerala state, on 25–28 September 2023.

The previous Aeya, held in 2018, called on the CCA to “organise Aeya at least once in five years,” appreciating the fruitfulness of spaces in which young Christians are reminded of their ability and power to analyse issues and determine solutions in collaboration with experts, victims, and survivors, among others. Five years, various political upheavals and a pandemic later, the Aeya has remained a platform for young ecumenists to address problems and challenges concerning and frustrating them as individuals, and as members of church and society.

Called from 12 countries and territories under the theme, “Asian Youth Affirming Renewal and Restoration of God’s Creation,” we brought with us stories from different faiths and spiritualities, cultures, ethnicities, socioeconomic classes, sexualities and more—some from our very own lives and the lives of those whom we consider friends and family, others from the vulnerable peoples with whom we express solidarity. These are narratives of suffering and survival, of hope and despair, of tragedy and victory, of gloom and festivity, amid the realities of a climate crisis that prevents the flourishing of a full and dignified life for all—concerns that we considered and discussed at Aeya.

As the 15<sup>th</sup> General Assembly of the Christian Conference of Asia gathers, the Aeya participants acknowledge the urgent need for renewal and restoration in God’s Creation, including humanity as part of God’s design. Through prayer, reflection, learning, and dialogue, we found the trouble and despair that overwhelm today’s young people but also found glimmers of hope in those among us whose faith drives them beyond helplessness into agency: into concern and activism for social and



environmental justice and compassion for fellow humans and the rest of Creation emanating from Christ-like radical love.

Inspired by youth in the Asian region who struggle for a vision of heaven on earth, and who have been made new by faith in Christ to partake in the divine mission of renewal and restoration, we pray:

### **God, Renew Us in Your Spirit**

The youth of Asia find that many people undervalue our capacities and capabilities. In societies, we are often ordered around, people perceiving us as inexperienced or unprepared, and thinking we could not stand by ourselves or contribute valid ideas. Assuming we will have our day sometime soon, they often dismiss or altogether neglect our thoughts, feelings, and opinions. The Church has been no different, relegating us to “reserves” who must begin in the lowest rungs and should stay behind others until our time comes.

But history has shown that youth taking leading roles in the contexts where they are planted have positively disrupted communities, forcing difficult conversations into the light, and helping communities transform. God also chose youth like Jeremiah, Timothy, and Esther as leaders in Biblical times. Churches must take heed and see young faithful’s vital role in the church, not only as the future of the church but as partakers of God’s mission now—one with the rest of God’s children. We would like the CCA General Assembly to allow the young generation to be part of the pursuit of church growth in Asia; to contribute to the adaptation of the churches to changing times, passing generations and diverse contexts; to be examples for youths across the globe.

Hope, energy, and idealism may lead to criticism of church structures and policies; but churches must be receptive to criticism for self-reflection and evaluation and pray for humility and wisdom to discern which ones could lead to better life, work, and witness. As such, the church must equip more young people for Christ-like leadership and expand the decision-making table to accommodate more youth. While we appreciate the concern for the youth, young Christians everywhere would much prefer churches that worry *with us*, *not just about us*.

May churches be renewed so they become worthy signposts heralding our vision of heaven on earth to the rest of the world.

### **God, Restore the Creation**

Ecumenical youth today, like young people in other arenas of discourse, do not simply ask for representation. They seek values that matter to them. They call for greater inclusiveness across all the structures of the

Church, down to the congregations; a readiness to bring unconventional or varied siblings in humankind and the rest of Creation into the fold, understanding that they are brought into existence by a mighty God who “creates diversities,” as noted by AEYA–2018.

AEYA participants also espouse a perspective of God as an active creator. This unlocks a sustainable view of Creation that is holistic, interrelated, and cosmic; not partial, fragmented, and androcentric. The Church should be an advocate not only for order among human beings, but in the whole of Creation.

AEYA–2023 places a specific emphasis on the climate crisis, but we find this global occurrence to be exacerbated by and contributing to issues of ‘unpeace’, displacement, and inequity, among others. In order for more church youth to respond to the groaning of Creation, the church must ensure that it has ministries open to the youth that go out to society, among the victims of climate-induced disasters and climate refugees and for the conservation of plants and animals endangered because of human intrusion and distressed habitats, among others. These programmes must address adaptation and resilience, safeguards ensuring people would not be caught up in endless cycles of trauma and devastation. These also include reforms in land distribution, indigenous peoples’ rights, and equitable and sustainable industrialisation, among others.

With God and the rest of the household joining us in this pursuit of renewal and restoration, we will succeed in our mission.

### **God, Be Present in Our Pilgrimage**

And so, with a wholehearted trust that God is with us, we enjoin the rest of the ecumenical household to realise the vision of heaven on earth. We issue calls to our fellow stewards to express their concern in actions that contribute to the active participation of more young people as stakeholders in the restoration.

- We ask the CCA to listen more to the voices of young people who share concerns for peace and justice in Asia, and to create spaces where more youth could participate in healing works with Christian compassion. It should open more opportunities to equip young people with Christ-like leadership.
- We ask the national ecumenical councils and churches to send more youth representatives to places where policies are set, encouraging and empowering them to bravely share their stories and ideas in those spaces. They should formalise youth participation in local canons and policies. They must also help youth come face to face

with the issues challenging humanity and Creation, aiding the establishment of ecumenical youth movements that gather not only for worship but also for life-committed service and prophetic witness.

- We enjoin young Christians to collective responsibility. More young people should go beyond themselves and their comfort zones to understand the pains of their fellows and of Creation as their own. With a deeper understanding of the complicated and intersectional nature of the climate crisis, they should address the concerns with other sectors and demographics—in multisectoral work and intergenerational dialogue among others.

As Ecumenical youth in Asia, we must remain committed to our role as siblings to one another and as stewards of Creation, sharing hope, love, and compassion. With God in us and with us, inspiring and accompanying us, we must relentlessly strive to achieve our vision of heaven on earth.

## **Statement of the Asian Ecumenical Women's Pre-Assembly (AEWA)**

### **Asian Ecumenical Women: Journeying Towards the Renewal and Restoration of God's Creation**

**26–28 September 2023 | Chaitanya Centre, Kottayam, India**

We, the delegates of the Asian Ecumenical Women's Assembly 2023, coming from 21 different countries across Asia, belonging to various churches, languages, cultures, and traditions, met together to deliberate on the CCA Assembly Theme 'God Renew us in Your Spirit, and Restore the Creation' with special focus on 'Women journeying towards the Renewal and Restoration of God's Creation'.

We met at Chaitanya, Kottayam, from 25-28 September 2023 and amid its natural and serene beauty, we reflected on how vulnerable our beautiful planet is to the disasters caused by climate change and global warming. We deliberated on the crux of the issues of climate and gender justice, the severity of the impacts of climate change that make creation groan; vulnerabilities and capabilities of women and girls in Asia in the face of climate emergencies; sharing of best practices and advocacy for climate justice, through Bible studies, thematic presentations, and group discussions.

We, the 63 church women who have gathered here from all walks of life, as mothers, sisters, and daughters, affirm that we were created in the image of God, giving us grace, and gratitude to celebrate life in its

abundance; and strength, courage and resilience in times of hardship and sorrow. We praise and thank God for the beauty of creation and for giving us the privilege of caring for it.

But we confess that humankind has not cared for the earth with the self-sacrificing and nurturing love that was required of us. We mourn the broken relationships in creation, we repent for our part in causing the current environmental crisis that has led to climate change. We pray to the Creator God to guide us and show us the way to restore and sustain the creation.

Acknowledging with humility the fact that humankind has tried to wield power over nature, we urge that because the earth is our only home and the home of all other beings as well, we must share the space with other human beings, other animals, and the natural world. Our theologies should speak within our earthly context, about our interrelationships and interdependence with all other creatures on our planet as well as our important differences, including responsibilities, from other lifeforms.

Realising that the problems of poverty, injustice, radicalism, and ecological crisis are caused by human greed, or attitudes that reflect a strong desire to gain and to accumulate materials and power for oneself or for one's group, churches should commit themselves to promoting a spirituality of moderation, which is based on the theological understanding that God provides enough resources for all the inhabitants of this planet.

We accept that there has to be a radical transformation of dominant cultures of consumerism, profit accumulation, marginalisation, gender inequality, and exploitation of nature in order to secure the sustainability of this planet, and thus prevent the collapse of civilisation.

The climate crisis impacts different groups differently, including on the basis of gender. We lament the grave injustice that those historically less responsible for global emissions must bear the brunt of the climate crisis. And yet these people in the Global South, not least in South and South-East Asia, are the least equipped to lower their emissions. Furthermore, it is women and girls who are affected most by the impacts of climate change.

We pray for a renewal of the spirit of God in us, so that women draw from the wellsprings of their inner being, their strengths and their capabilities to restore and recreate a world of inclusivity that embraces all of creation and gives equal opportunities to everyone to decide on what is best for them, a people who celebrate and preserve earth's diversity and a community of communities that work together in solidarity.

To this end we urge women:

- To adopt a spirituality of moderation, simplicity and an attitude of compassion, concern and understanding towards humankind, especially the poorest of the poor who struggle to live in a world of imbalances and inequalities; and towards all other lifeforms that share the Earth's benevolence and abundance;
- To take up the struggle for justice and equality with the courage and righteous indignation that Jesus showed while evicting the traders who adopted unhealthy practices in the house of God;
- To educate and equip themselves to create awareness in children, the family, their immediate neighbourhood, the community and beyond;
- To equip and educate women, youngsters and peer groups with the basics of disaster management that will help them to cope with disasters not only for themselves but for the community;
- To sensitise themselves and others on governmental policies and laws on the protection of the environment and with regard to the challenges posed by climate change;
- To bridge the intergenerational gap with love, concern and empathy that understands and addresses the conflict between older schools of thought and the adventurous and forward-thinking perspectives of younger generations;
- To seek solutions from traditional cultures but also to maintain a healthy balance and appreciation for the new technologies that the younger generation is more comfortable with and that present opportunities for innovative responses;
- Advocate for the safety of Internally Displaced People, especially women and girls who have to migrate due to environmental disasters;
- To network with other groups, social activists, and NGOs to be forerunners and leaders in the campaign against climate change and environmental care;
- To believe that God is in charge, to give thanks, declare God's loving kindness in the morning, and faithfulness every night. Psalm 92:1-2

We urge the Churches to:

- Give priority to discussions on climate change and be inclusive in these discussions as many have not heard of climate change;
- Continue biblical and theological research and education to articulate the mandate for climate and gender justice and to identify new and additional paradigms for urgent action;

- Promote spirituality and action, inspire dreams, combat dominance and greed, and overcome the fear of loss and sacrifice;
- Promote sustainable lifestyles that are appropriate to each context;
- Sensitise the congregation on the issues and problems of climate change, in Sunday sermons, prayer meetings, and publications;
- Teach environmental care in Church-run institutions;
- Establish and affirm committees for action on Climate Change;
- Monitor the implementation/violation of environmental protection policies and laws;
- Advocate for and work together with the Government in the implementation of such policies.

We urge CCA and other ecumenical organisations to:

- Unite with the grass-root member churches and organisations to raise awareness; advocate change in lifestyles and enhance preparedness in times of disaster;
- Cooperate with corporates and other high-level agencies in times of disaster and to prevent disaster;
- Publish guidelines on eco-friendly churches, and conduct more in-depth studies, the results of which can be shared worldwide;
- Develop mutual accountability mechanisms between CCA and member churches and organisations, which may include self-assessment tools such as adapting the Pacific Conference of Churches' Gender Status Card to the Asian context;
- Establish a dedicated Commission on Climate Change, focusing on the vulnerabilities and capacities of the marginalised, the women and children and the economically weaker sections of society.

We, the ecumenical women of Asia, are convinced that as half the population of the world is spread across Asia, any remedial measures in terms of lifestyles; best practices on waste management, rainwater harvesting, use of alternate sources of energy; switching over to safer and cleaner farming by banning fertilizers that poison the soil and water and harm children; inclusiveness and a stop to exploitation of nature and our ecosystems, will make a huge impact, giving an Asia Model for the world to appreciate and adopt.

We affirm that throughout the history of the world, women have stood up and faced the challenges of 'life and living' and will continue to do so as the spirit of God permeates our being, imbuing/restoring in us love, compassion, and courage.

We acknowledge that the journey is not easy, it cannot be accomplished on our own and that it will take time; nevertheless, let us go forth as sisters in cooperation and faith in our journey towards the renewal and restoration of God's creation and to be co-creators of a new Heaven and a new Earth!

## **Statement of the Asian Ecumenical Migrants Advocacy Network (AEMAN) Pre-Assembly Forum Meeting**

### **The Rights and Dignity of Asian Migrant Workers in the Diaspora**

**26–28 September 2023 | CMS College, Kottayam, India**

The Asian Ecumenical Migrants Advocacy Network (AEMAN) of the Christian Conference of Asia (CCA) in collaboration with the National Council of Churches in India (NCCI) held a Pre-Assembly event on 'The Rights and Dignity of Asian Migrant Workers in the Diaspora' at the Rev. Joseph Fenn Hall, CMS College, Kottayam, India from 26<sup>th</sup> to 28<sup>th</sup> September 2023. About 50 participants, representing constituent members of CCA, ecumenical organisations and networks, theological institutions, grassroots organisations, and local churches, attended the event.

The event began with a thematic address on the Rights and Dignity of Asian Migrant Workers in the Diaspora" in which the numerous issues surrounding labour migration and its impacts on the families were highlighted, with examples from Kerala and other sending states. There were biblical reflections each day on the themes of "Affirming God's Will: Justice and Hospitality for Restoration and Renewal", "The Exodus Narrative: Liberation and Journey to Freedom as Attaining the Fullness of Life", and "Jesus as the Migrant: Incarnation and Solidarity in his Dwelling with Creation", which underpinned the discussions, deliberations and the action plan formulated at the event.

The challenges faced by Asian migrant workers in the post-COVID-19 pandemic context in relation to labour market trends and prospects, ethical recruitment, fair migration, systemic inequalities, the impact of migration on the family, as well as return and reintegration were some of the areas that were highlighted at this gathering. It was noted that protecting and promoting the personal security, dignity and rights of Asian migrant workers, the majority of whom are unskilled/low-skilled, have proven to be persistent and burning realities, needing urgent and



## CCA Pre-Assemblies

### Asian Ecumenical Youth Assembly (AEYA)



Participants of AEYA



AEYA participants engaging in discussions during a workshop



## Asian Ecumenical Women's Assembly (AEWA)



CCA General Secretary Dr Mathews George Chunakara addressing AEWA



Dayabai addressing AEWA



Asian Ecumenical Institute (AEI) 2023 Participants





Asian Ecumenical Migrants Advocacy Network (AEMAN) Pre-Assembly Participants



Rev. Prof. Dr Dietrich Werner-Dörfel, Humboldt University Berlin  
speaks at Ecumenical Diakonia Consultation



Asian Ecumenical Diakonia Pre-Assembly Participants

## CCA Assembly Local Host Committee Meetings



Assembly Local Host Committee meeting  
at St Ephrem Ecumenical Research Institute (SEERI), Kottayam



From left to right: Rt Rev. V. S. Francis; HG Dr Kuriakose Mor Theophilose;  
His Beatitude Dr Theodosius Mar Thoma Metropolitan;  
HG Metropolitan Dr Yakoob Mar Irenaios; Rt Rev. Dr Abraham Mar Paulos



Opening of Assembly Office at Kottayam



Meeting of the Local Host Committee  
at the Mar Thoma Theological Seminary Chapel, Kottayam



CCA and NCCI Assembly organisers with leaders of the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church, Kottayam Diocese – HG Dr Yuhanon Mar Diascoros Metropolitan; Rev. Fr K M Zachariah; Rev. Fr Jeo Joseph



Press conference at the Kottayam Press Club ahead of the opening of the Assembly  
From left to right: Anoop C John; Rev. Asir Ebenezer; Dr Mathews George Chunakara; Rev. Dr Abraham Mathew and Dr Paul Manalil



## Assembly Daily Newspapers



## CCA Assembly Organising Teams



CCA Staff Assembly Organising Team



CCA Assembly Local Host Committee Members at the Assembly closing plenary



CCA Assembly Stewards



NCCI Co-opted Staff

CCA Assembly Worship Team



CCA Assembly Media and Communications Team



## CCA 15<sup>th</sup> General Assembly Closing Worship



Most Rev. Joel O. Porlares, the 14<sup>th</sup> Obispo Maximo of the Iglesia Filipina Independiente (IFI), delivering the homily at the closing worship



Participants partaking in the Holy Eucharist



Members from different ecclesial traditions leading the Holy Eucharist Service



Sharing of peace



Installation of newly elected CCA Officers and Executive Committee members

effective interventions by the Asian churches and ecumenical movements. The role of the churches in advocacy and accompaniment throughout the migration process is pivotal, especially in view of CCA having identified an urgent need to engage with representatives from the countries of origin and destination, and the service providers, to advocate for and promote a culture of human rights and human dignity, to end exploitation, abuse and violence, and to promote the empowerment of the most vulnerable of the migrant workers.

## **Our Concerns**

Although a fair number of reforms have been initiated and implemented after over half a century of labour migration to the Arabian Gulf, the major issues have more or less remained the same: undocumented unskilled and low-skilled migrant workers, unethical practices of unscrupulous recruitment agents, intermediaries, and employers, unfair contracts, debt bondage, wage theft, substandard living and working conditions, inability to access healthcare and justice services, exploitation, poor grievance redress mechanisms, violence, abuse and trafficking. A majority of the migrant workers continue to be employed as domestic workers, who are often denied the benefits of reforms to labour laws in the countries of destination, leaving them vulnerable and without redress.

The issues of migrant workers are human rights issues, which are ordinarily the domain of governments and international organisations. However, interventions by national, regional and international agencies, including churches, ecumenical networks and civil society organisations are vital in finding effective contextual solutions, through shared resources, information/lived experiences, technical knowledge/skills, etc. The migrant workers' issues intersect with the issues of women, children, fatherhood, health, geopolitics, education, economy, and ecology. As they are human issues, the personhood of the migrant worker must form the focal point for collaborative efforts for effective strategies.

Migrant workers' families too require support and solidarity. The mental and emotional stresses associated with migration deeply impact the members of the families and children in particular. The repatriation and reintegration of returning migrant workers with their families and communities is another area of concern. Strategies need to be formulated alongside programmes for the protection and promotion of rights-based migration practices by all stakeholders in keeping with international standards and norms.

Another concern highlighted is that the majority of the countries of origin and destination are yet to ratify the United Nations Convention for the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of

their Families and the various International Labour Organisation (ILO) conventions and non-binding guidelines. The immediate need for all governments in the Asia region to ratify and uphold the spirit of these Conventions must be underscored.

**We, the participants of AEMAN, hereby urge CCA and its constituencies:**

1. To incorporate the theme of labour migration into the various thematic programmes of CCA and its constituencies, thus placing emphasis on the universality and urgency of the issues involved.
2. To prepare and make available biblical and theological study material on labour migration and to provide a theological basis for accompaniment, solidarity, and hospitality to the migrants throughout the migration process.<sup>1</sup>
3. To facilitate the sourcing of alternative funding and resources to strengthen the capacity of local churches to advocate for migrant workers' rights effectively. This includes monitoring and evaluating the programmes to improve and measure their progress and quality.
4. To strengthen the existing ecumenical networks of CCA to enable the churches in the host and sending countries to unite in their service of liberation<sup>2</sup> to the migrant workers and their families.
5. To encourage and empower churches to follow in Jesus' footsteps of becoming incarnational societies, living in solidarity with migrant workers and learning to yield to God's Holy Spirit for the transformation of the interactive spaces so created into sacramental spaces.<sup>3</sup>
6. To facilitate training in counselling ministries to serve the psycho-social needs of migrant workers and their families.

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<sup>1</sup> "Hospitality is a sacred duty and an identification with the very nature of God. Love for the stranger (philoxenia) is to overcome the fear of the stranger (xenophobia). It is only when those in the fringes are called for and brought in, God's house becomes full and hospitality becomes justice for the powerless." – Rt. Rev. Dr Daniel S. Thiagarajah – "Affirming God's Will: Justice and Hospitality for Restoration and Renewal".

<sup>2</sup> Yahweh being the initiator and executor of the liberation journey of the Israelites; exodus from slavery to freedom, dependency to independence. Yahweh, who is present among his people, establishes a new social order of justice and compassion sustained by being in a covenant relationship with God. – Rev. Prince Devanandan

<sup>3</sup> Rev. Dr P G George

## Report of the Assembly Nominations Committee

Chairperson of the Nominations Committee, Rev Tara Tautari, presented the following slate of names:

POSITIONS	CHURCH OR COUNCIL	O/L	M/F	Y
<b>MODERATOR</b>				
Bishop Reuel Norman Marigza	United Church of Christ in the Philippines	O	M	
<b>VICE MODERATOR</b>				
Dr Anna Alisha Mathew Simon	Council of Churches of Malaysia	L	F	
<b>TREASURER</b>				
The Very Rev. Chan Kwok-keung	Hong Kong Christian Council	O	M	
<b>EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MEMBERS</b>				
Rev. Jacklevyn Frits Manuputty	The Communion of Churches in Indonesia	O	M	
Dr Youngmi Cho	Presbyterian Church of Korea	L	F	
Ven. David Nigel Perry Brohier	Church of Ceylon	O	M	
Archbishop Dikran Sebouh Sarkissian	Armenian Orthodox Church of Iran	O	M	
Rev. Dethsacda Aphayamath	Laos Evangelical Church	O	M	
Dr Rev. Pradit Takerngrangsarit	Church of Christ in Thailand	O	M	
Rev. Levi Vasconcelos Pinto	Igreja Protestante iha Timor Lorosa'e	O	M	
Rev. David Anirudha Das	NCC Bangladesh	O	M	
Ms Zion Chung	Korean Christian Church in Japan	L	F	

Mrs Basanti Biswas	Methodist Church in India	L	F	
Nant Ruth Shwe Sin Nyein Aye	Myanmar Council of Churches	L	F	Y
Ms Dymeas Sovy	Kampuchea Christian Council	L	F	Y
Ms Tiurida Hutabarat	Protestant Christian Batak Church	L	F	
Mr Su-Hong Lim	Presbyterian Church in Taiwan	L	M	Y
Rev. John Gilmore	NCC Australia	O	M	
Ms Hannah Manickyam Cassandra Mesa	Anglican Church in Aotearoa, New Zealand, and Polynesia	L	F	
<b>PROGRAMME COMMITTEE CHAIRPERSON</b>				
H.G. Dr Kuriakose Mor Theophilose Metropolitan	Malankara Jacobite Syrian Orthodox Church	O	M	
Total: 20 Male: 12 (Ordained: 11, Youth, Lay: 1) Female: 8 (Ordained: 1, Lay: 7, Youth, Lay: 2)				

*Key: O/L = Ordained/Lay; M/F = Male/Female; Y = Youth*

The Assembly unanimously adopted the names proposed by the Nominations Committee.

# **Minutes of the 15<sup>th</sup> CCA General Assembly**

## **Thursday, 28 September 2023 (Day 1)**

### **I. Opening Worship**

The CCA General Assembly (GA) began with an act of worship on Thursday, 23 September 2023 in the Mammen-Mappila Hall. The sermon was delivered by Rev. Idan Topno from the Gossner Evangelical Lutheran Church.

### **II. Inaugural Session and General Session #1**

The inaugural session commenced with a welcome and opening remarks from the Moderator of the CCA, Bishop Dhiloraj Canagasabey. The General Secretary of the World Council of Churches (WCC), Rev. Dr Jerry Pillay, brought greetings to the CCA on behalf of the WCC.

Felicitous greetings were brought by the heads of the six partner churches that are hosting the Assembly:

1. His Holiness Baselios Marthoma Mathews III Catholicos, Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church
2. Most Rev. Dr Theodosius Marthoma Metropolitan, Malankara Mar Thoma Syrian Church
3. Rt. Rev. Dr Rueben Mark, Acting Moderator, Church of South India
4. His Eminence Joseph Mor Gregorios, Malankara Jacobite Syrian Church
5. His Beatitude Cyril Mar Baselios, Malabar Independent Syrian Church
6. His Grace Dr Abraham Mar Paulos, Malankara Mar Thoma Syrian Church and President of the Local Host Committee
7. Rev. Asir Ebenezer, General Secretary, National Council of Churches in India
8. Rev. Dr Henriette Hutabarat–Lebang, Asia President, World Council of Churches

### **III. Thematic Presentation I**

Rev. Dr Jerry Pillay, the General Secretary of the World Council of Churches, delivered the keynote address on the Assembly theme “God renew us in your spirit and restore creation.” In his address, Dr Pillay pointed to the signs of the times which makes this theme so urgent. He provided a strong theological foundation for the necessity and responsibility of Christians to work in concert with God’s intention for creation and spoke on how the

church can participate in this shared project of God's desire for a healthy and just world. Reminding the gathered people that the theme is a prayer, Dr Pillay exhorted them to see that renewal and restoration need to start in our hearts and practices. Dr Pillay concluded that, notwithstanding the challenges faced, our hope—leading to concrete actions that express and move towards that hope—will be realised because the Spirit of God enlivens and empowers our actions until God's will is done on earth as it is in heaven.

## **Friday, 29 September 2023 (Day 2)**

### **IV. Morning Worship**

The worship was held in the Jerusalem Mar Thoma Church.

The worship was led by Ms Neethu M. Mammen, Rev. Ko Kwok Hung, Bussakorn Pawenapakorn, Ven. David Nigel Perry Brohier, Ms Loini Simeti, and Rev. Dethsacda Aphayamath.

### **V. Business Session #1**

The business sessions were all held in the Juhanon Mar Thoma Hall.

Moderator: Bishop Reuel Norman Marigza

#### **Introduction to Consensus Business Procedures**

For the first time, the CCA Assembly will make use of consensus decision-making processes, using the framework employed by the WCC. Delegates and participants were provided with an overview of the principles and practices of consensus decision-making as it will be used at this Assembly. The brief orientation was given by Rev. Terence Corkin and Rev. Tara Tautari.

Bishop Marigza welcomed the Assembly participants.

#### **a. Roll Call**

The Moderator led the roll call of the member churches and councils.

The Moderator declared that there was a quorum.

#### **b. Declaration of the Opening of the 15<sup>th</sup> General Assembly**

Bishop Marigza declared the 15<sup>th</sup> CCA General Assembly open.

#### **c. Report of the Moderator**

The Acting Moderator of the CCA, Bishop Dhiloraj Canagasabey presented his report.



Bishop Canagasabey began by acknowledging the sadness felt by the CCA community at the passing of the Moderator elected at the 14<sup>th</sup> Assembly, Archbishop Willem T.P. Simarmata, from the Huria Kristen Batak Protestan (HKBP).

In his report, the Acting Moderator acknowledged the significant challenges created for the people and churches of Asia due to catastrophic climate change, continuing health and economic difficulties post-COVID and ongoing oppression in many places.

Bishop Canagasabey expressed gratitude to the General Secretary for his significant and faithful leadership over a very demanding eight years.

In conclusion, the Acting Moderator encouraged the churches in Asia to remain confident in the power of the Holy Spirit to support them in the fulfilment of their calling as the people of God in Asia.

**GA 2023/01**     *The Assembly received the report.*

#### **d. Report of the General Secretary**

The General Secretary, Dr Mathews George Chunakara, presented his report on the last eight years.

Dr Mathews George Chunakara began his report by explaining the reason for the need to appoint an Acting Moderator and Acting Vice Moderator. As noted previously, Bishop Willem Simarmata passed away, and Rev. Diana Tana resigned from her role. The Executive Committee, acting under provisions of the Constitution, appointed Bishop Dhiloraj Canagasabey as Acting Moderator and Bishop Reuel Norman Marigza as Acting Vice Moderator.

The General Secretary located the meeting of the 15<sup>th</sup> Assembly within the context of the many new and old challenges facing the people and churches of Asia. Since the 14<sup>th</sup> Assembly in Jakarta, the new structures for governance and programmes that were approved at the special meeting in Jakarta have been implemented.

It was reported that in the last eight years, 224 large and small events were held, attracting the involvement of 9,693. This is a significant increase from previous periods. A major external review of the programmes has been undertaken and overseen by the Executive Committee. This Assembly will receive and consider the findings of this report.

The General Secretary outlined the long and complex history of considering the possibility of relocating the CCA headquarters from

Chiang Mai. This continues to be a pressing matter given legal, regulatory, financial, and immigration issues that seem to only get less hospitable to the working of the CCA. This issue will need to be considered by the next Executive Committee.

Dr Mathews George Chunakara concluded by thanking the Officers and Executive committee members for their collaborative and supportive way of work since their appointment in 2015.

**GA 2023/02**     *The Assembly received the report.*

### **e. Appointments**

**GA 2023/03**     *The Assembly confirmed the appointment of the following persons to Committees and various roles:*

### **Members of the Steering Committee**

1. Rt. Rev. Dhiloraj Canagasabey, Moderator (acting)
2. Bishop Reuel Norman Marigza, Vice Moderator (acting)
3. Mr Augustine Dipak Karmakar, Treasurer
4. Dr Mathews George Chunakara, General Secretary
5. Rev. Huang Shin-Yi, Presbyterian Church in Taiwan
6. Rev. Dr Kim Jong Goo, Methodist Church in Korea
7. Rev. Moises Antonio Da Silva, Protestant Church in Timor Leste
8. Nirmala Gurung, National Council of Churches in Nepal
9. Mr Win Htut Thar Kyi, Myanmar Baptist Convention
10. Fr Abraham Mathew, National Council of Churches in India
11. Rev. John Charles Gilmore, Convenor of the Public Issues Committee
12. Rev. Dr Asir Ebenezer, Convenor of the Credential Committee
13. Ven. David Nigel Perry Brohier, Convenor of the Nominations Committee

### **Members of the Credential Committee**

1. Rev. Asir Ebenezer David, NCCI (Convenor)
2. Rev. Zion Chung, Korean Christian Church in Japan
3. Rev. Jimmy Marcos Immanuel, The Protestant Church in Western Part of Indonesia
4. Rev. Dr Pradit Takerngrangsarit, Church of Christ in Thailand
5. Ms Karunyapriya Maryam Mathews, Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church  
(Assisted by: General Secretary or a staff assigned by him)

### **Members of the Nomination Committee**

1. David Nigel Perry Brohier, Church of Ceylon (Convenor)
2. Rev. Dr Jonggoo Kim, Korean Methodist Church
3. Ms Rosiana Purnomo, The Church of Christ of Jesus Christ in Indonesia
4. Ms Tara Tautari, Maori Council of Churches
5. Rev. Dethsacda Aphayamath, Lao Evangelical Church
6. Mr Shajan George, Malankara Mar Thoma Syrian Church
7. Rev. Rannieh B Mercado, United Church of Christ in the Philippines
8. Rev. Manh Palmerston, Myanmar Council of Churches
9. Dr Anna Alisha Mathew Simon, Council of Churches of Malaysia  
(Assisted by: General Secretary or a staff)

### **Members of the Public Issues Committee**

1. Rev. John Charles Gilmore, National Council of Churches in Australia (Convenor)
2. Rt. Rev. Steven Lawrence, Evangelical Lutheran Church in Malaysia and Singapore
3. Rev. Ebenezer Joseph, Methodist Church of Sri Lanka
4. Ms Agnes Souisa, The Protestant Church in Maluku
5. Mr Mervin H. Toquero, National Council of Churches in the Philippines  
(Assisted by: CCA Staff)

### **Minutes Takers**

1. Rev. Dr Victor Tinambunan, Batak Protestant Christian Church
2. Ms Minnie Anne M. Calub, National Council of Churches in the Philippines
3. Ms Basanti Biswas, Methodist Church of India  
(Assisted by: Co-opted Staff)

### **Minutes Readers**

1. Rev. Ebenezer Joseph, Methodist Church in Sri Lanka
2. Rev. Jyoti Singh, National Council of Churches in India

Tea and Coffee Break

## **VI. General Session #2: Thematic Presentation II**

Moderator: Rev. Dr Pradit Takerngrangsarit

The Moderator introduced the presenters on the sub-theme, 'Renewal and Restoration of Creation: Affirming the Will of God'.

The presentations were delivered by indigenous Asian theologians, Dr Judy Berinai, Sabah Theological Seminary, Malaysia, and Rev. Dr Ferdinand Anno, United Church of Christ in the Philippines.

Lunch

## **VII. Business Session #2**

Moderator: Bishop Dhilloraj Canagasabey

### **Adoption of Standing Orders**

**GA 2023/04** *The Assembly adopted the Standing Orders as recommended by the Executive Committee.*

### **Report of the Treasurer**

The Treasurer noted that the main sources of income are contributions by member churches and councils, ecumenical partners, and other income.

Gradually contributions from churches have been increasing. The amount contributed has doubled since 2010. This is due to the increase in fees in 2016, the General Secretary being diligent in following up arrears and a greater recognition of contributions that are made “in kind.”

The contribution of ecumenical partners continues its significant decline. There was a 44 percent reduction from 2022 to this year, a reduction from USD 322,000 to USD 182,000. This source provides 50 percent of CCA income and the external partners remain under significant financial pressure.

“Other income” is the smallest category and is not very reliable. Included here is investment income and individual people make contributions by not accepting the full amount of reimbursement to which they are entitled.

The deficit in 2022 was USD 150,000. In the previous four years, there were surpluses due to the ability to deliver programmes remotely and save on delivery costs.

Budget variances remain a consistent issue. Budgeted income is always higher than actual and budgeted expenses, often lower than actual expenditures. In 2022 these variances were 65 percent and 50 percent respectively.

The challenge continues to be how to move to self-reliance. The Treasurer’s report offers an eight-pronged approach to this issue.

**GA 2023/05**    *The Assembly received the report.*

Questions and discussion followed the reception of the reports.

Tea and Coffee Break

### **Report of the Credentials Committee**

The Convenor of the Credential Committee presented the report of the Committee. The Committee made recommendations for future guidance.

**GA 2023/06**    *The Assembly received the Report of the Credentials Committee.*

### **Greetings from Ecumenical Partners**

Felicitous greetings were brought from

1. Dn. Kerry Ruth Scarlett, Methodist Church in Britain
2. Ms Sheila Avril Norris, Methodist Church in Britain
3. Rev. Frida Falk, Church of Sweden
4. Ms Patricia Kathryn Talbot, United Church of Canada and the Foundation for Theological Education in South-East Asia (FTESEA)

### **VIII. Deliberative Session #1**

Participants and delegates moved to pre-assigned small groups to discuss the Programme Review 2015–2023.

### **IX. Evening Worship**

Evening worship was held in the Jerusalem Mar Thoma Church. The worship was led by the youth.

Dinner

*Adopted by the General Assembly (GA2023/07)*

### **Saturday, 30 September 2023 (Day 3)**

#### **X. Morning Worship**

Morning Worship led by Rev. Dr Esther Pudjo Widiasih and team was held at Jerusalem Marthoma Church.

#### **XI. General Session #3**

The session was moderated by Bishop Dhiloraj Canagasabey.

Bishop Canagasabey welcomed ecclesial and ecumenical guests and invited them to bring felicitous greetings.

Greetings were brought by:

1. Dr Andrea Maria Mann, Anglican Church of Canada
2. Mr William Jansson Winge, Church of Sweden
3. Rev. Dr Risto Jukko, Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland
4. Metropolitan Sevryuk Anton, Russian Orthodox Church Moscow Patriarchate

Tea and Coffee Break

### **Minutes Reading Committee**

**GA 2023/07**     *The Minutes Secretaries presented the Report on the Minutes from the General Assembly from Thursday and Friday, (28 and 29 September) which was reviewed and found to be an accurate record of the meeting.*

### **Thematic Presentation III**

The Moderator welcomed and introduced the contributors from other faith traditions and invited them to present their contributions on Interfaith Perspectives on ‘Renewal and Restoration of Creation: Dwelling in Harmony.’

1. Buddhist Perspective: Ven. Kekirawe Sudassana Thero
2. Muslim Perspective: Dr Citra Fitri Agustina
3. Sikh Perspective: Dr Sardar Sajjan Singh
4. Jain Perspective: Dr S. S. Bhaattarka Charukeerthi  
Pandithacharyavarya Mahaswaiji
5. Hindu Perspective: Swami Narasimhananda

Lunch

### **XII. Asian Ecumenical Festival (AEF)**

The Asian Ecumenical Festival, a celebration of the Asian Churches and the ecumenical movement together with local churches and ecumenical communities was held in the Mammen Mappilla Hall from 3:00 to 7:30 pm. It was a celebration of Asian Culture through performances that showcased the beauty, rhythm, and ethos of ancient times. Hailed as the first Ecumenical Festival to be held in conjunction with a General Assembly, the General Secretary said that the energy and synergy of this event is a manifestation of hope in action on the ecumenical journey.

Tea and Coffee break

The AEF continued with a public meeting. The Chief Guest, Honourable Chief Minister of Kerala, Shri Pinarayi Vijayan, congratulated the CCA for its efforts in promoting peace and harmony in the context of growing polarisation between countries, religions, and ethnic communities.

After the opening remarks by the CCA Moderator, Bishop Dhiloraj Canagasabey, felicitations and greetings were brought by:

1. Most Rev. Dr Theodosius Marthoma Metropolitan, Malankara Marthoma Syrian Church
2. Rev. Prof. Dr Jerry Pillay, General Secretary of the World Council of Churches
3. Metropolitan His Grace Dr Geevarghese Mar Yulios, President, National Council of Churches in India
4. Shri V. N. Vasavan, Honourable Minister for Culture, Cinema, Cooperation, and Registration, Govt. of Kerala
5. His Eminence Joseph Mor Gregorios, Malankara Jacobite Syrian Church
6. Bishop Timothy Ravinder, Coimbatore Diocese, Church of South India

Concluding remarks were made by H.G. Dr Abraham Mar Paulos, Malankara Marthoma Syrian Church, and President of the Local Host Committee.

The AEF was followed by dinner.

### **Sunday, 1 October 2023 (Day 4)**

#### **XIII. Worship with Local Congregations**

In the morning, the Assembly participants worshipped with local churches and congregations across Kottayam bringing them greetings from the CCA and spreading awareness of the Assembly theme. They were hosted by congregations of the hosting churches in the best traditions of Asian hospitality and in ecumenical fellowship.

#### **XIV. Deliberative Session #2: 'Churcha' Discussions**

Delegates and Participants moved to three venues to discuss 15 different topics of importance in the life of the CCA and the churches.

Evening worship was held in three locations where the Churcha or ecumenical conversations were held.

Dinner was held at Jerusalem Mar Thoma Church premises.

*Adopted by the General Assembly (GA2023/08)*



## **Monday, 2 October 2023 (Day 5)**

### **XV. Morning Worship**

Worship was held in the Jerusalem Mar Thoma Church.

The Worship was led by Ms Joy Han, Ms Zion Chung, and participants from the Asian Ecumenical Institute.

### **XVI. Business Session #3**

The session was held in the Juhanon Mar Thoma Hall

The session was moderated by Bishop Dhiloraj Canagasabey and Bishop Reuel Norman Marigza.

### **Minutes Reading Committee**

**GA 2023/08**     *The Minutes Secretaries presented the Report on the Minutes from the General Assembly from Saturday and Sunday (30 September and 1 October) which was reviewed and found to be an accurate record of the meeting.*

### **Ecumenical and Partner Greetings**

Felicitous greetings were brought by:

1. Dn. Darlene Marquez Caramanzana, the United Methodist Church - General Board of Global Ministries
2. Rev. Jieun Kim Han, Presbyterian Church USA World Mission
3. Ms Yowanda Yongarra, World Student Christian Federation
4. Most Rev. Francis Serrao, Federation of Asian Bishops Conference

### **Nominations Committee Report**

Background on the work of the Committee was provided by the General Secretary. Two members of the Nominations Committee had to step down, including the Chairperson, due to being nominated for positions by their Church or Council.

Rev. Tara Tautari was identified by the Committee as a replacement Chairperson.

Rev. Tautari then brought the report of the Committee. More nominations are required and so the Committee will be reaching out to Churches and Councils to identify additional nominations given the significant issues that face the CCA in the next five-year period of time.

**GA 2023/09**     *The Assembly appointed Rev Tara Tautari as the Chairperson of the Nominations Committee.*

**GA 2023/10**     *The Assembly noted the need for the Nominations Committee to seek additional nominations before bringing nominations to the Assembly and affirmed it in making approaches to Churches and member Councils for additional nominations.*

## **XVII. General Session #4: Thematic Presentation IV**

Renewal and Restoration of Creation: Attaining Life in its Fullness.

Thematic presentations on Attaining Fullness of Life were presented by Rev. Prof. Dr Vicky Balabanski, Flinders University, Australia, and Rev. Dr Raj Bharat Patta, Andhra Evangelical Lutheran Church in India/Methodist Church in the UK.

Speaking about Creation as the means whereby life is revealed in the Gospel, Rev. Vicky said that we can live life in abundance when Jesus is the good shepherd and that Jesus is indeed the garden in his embodied presence, the creator and the recreator in whom we can live life in its fullness.

Rev. Bharat focused his presentation on the conviction that life is not a monopoly for human beings but for all forms of creation. He advocated a return to the soil, which nurtures and sustains and teaches us humility and complementarity; to learn from trees and plants that get their strength from their rootedness; cohabitation and coexistence and most importantly that life cannot be lived on its own. He called for a re-visioning to see the church as a mustard seed, that gives shelter to birds. God does not speak of fruits for harvesting or for enhancing the economy but as emblems of compassion and love for fellow beings.

Tea and Coffee Break

## **XVIII. Deliberative Session #3**

The session was moderated by Bishop Dhiloraj Canagasabey and Bishop Reuel Norman Marigza.

The reports of the Programme Review groups were presented.

- General Secretariat, Finance, Relationship, and Communications – Rev. Dr A. Joshua Peter

- Mission in Unity and Contextual Theology and Ecumenical Leadership Formation and Ecumenical Spirituality – Ms Romelyn D. Bautista
- Building Peace and Moving Beyond Conflicts and Prophetic Diakonia and Advocacy – Rev. Jimmy Sormin

Programme Directions were discussed in groups.

Lunch

## **XIX. Business Session # 4**

The session was moderated by Bishop Dhiloraj Canagasabay and Bishop Reuel Norman Marigza.

### **Reports**

#### **a. Programme Direction**

The reports from the discussion groups were presented by

- General Secretariat, Finance, Relationship, and Communications – Rev. Dr Kim Minji
- Mission in Unity and Contextual Theology and Ecumenical Leadership Formation and Ecumenical Spirituality – Ms Romelyn D. Bautista
- Building Peace and Moving Beyond Conflicts and Prophetic Diakonia and Advocacy – Mr Saw Dah Eh Bway Dho Htoo

**GA 2023/11**    *The 15<sup>th</sup> General Assembly received the reports on the Programme Directions.*

#### **b. Public Issues Committee**

Rev. John Gilmore, Ms Agnes Sousa, Mr Mervin Sol H. Toquero, Bishop Stephen Lawrence, and Rev. William Premkumar Ebenezer Joseph presented the report of the Public Issues Committee.

Areas covered included Australia's First Peoples' Voice; Exploitative Extraction and Forcible Displacement; 70 Years after the Armistice: A Statement for Reconciliation and Peace on the Korean Peninsula; Let Peace be the Imperative, not the Alternative: Concern About Increasing Militarisation in Asia; Creation Care; Human Dignity and the Wholeness of Life; the Debt Crisis; Human Trafficking and Forced Migration; and Continuing Human Rights Violations in the Philippines.

The proposals as presented received feedback to assist the Public Issues Committee in the preparation of its final report.

**c. Statement from the Asian Ecumenical Migrant Advocacy Pre-Assembly Meeting**

The report was presented by Rt. Rev. Steven Lawrence. The Statement spoke of the issues and injustices that are present in the field of migrant workers under the theme: “The Rights and Dignity of Asian Migrant Workers in the Asian Diaspora”.

Tea and Coffee Break

**XX. General Session #5**

The session was moderated by His Grace Dr Yakoob Mar Irenaios Metropolitan.

**D.T. Niles Memorial Lecture**

The General Secretary, Dr Mathews George Chunakara introduced Ms Daya Bai, a Roman Catholic nun turned social activist, who delivered the D.T. Niles Memorial lecture. She shared her personal story and experiences from her ministry in word, song, and dramatisation.

**XXI. Business Session #5**

The session was moderated by Bishop Dhiloraj Canagasabey.

**a. Nominations Committee**

Rev. Tara Tautari presented the report of the Nominations Committee.

**GA 2023/12**    *The following persons were elected to the roles:*

POSITIONS	CHURCH OR COUNCIL	O/L	M/F	Y
<b>MODERATOR</b>				
Bishop Reuel Norman Marigza	United Church of Christ in the Philippines	O	M	
<b>VICE MODERATOR</b>				
Dr Anna Alisha Mathew Simon	Council of Churches of Malaysia	L	F	
<b>TREASURER</b>				
The Very Rev. Chan Kwok-keung	Hong Kong Christian Council	O	M	

<b>EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MEMBERS</b>				
Rev. Jacklevyn Frits Manuputty	The Communion of Churches in Indonesia	O	M	
Dr Youngmi Cho	Presbyterian Church of Korea	L	F	
Ven. David Nigel Perry Brohier	Church of Ceylon	O	M	
Archbishop Dikran Sebouh Sarkissian	Armenian Orthodox Church of Iran	O	M	
Rev. Dethsacda Aphayamath	Laos Evangelical Church	O	M	
Dr Rev. Pradit Takerngrangsarit	Church of Christ in Thailand	O	M	
Rev. Levi Vasconcelos Pinto	Igreja Protestante iha Timor Lorosa'e	O	M	
Rev. David Anirudha Das	NCC Bangladesh	O	M	
Ms Zion Chung	Korean Christian Church in Japan	L	F	
Mrs Basanti Biswas	Methodist Church in India	L	F	
Nant Ruth Shwe Sin Nyein Aye	Myanmar Council of Churches	L	F	Y
Ms Dymeas Sovy	Kampuchea Christian Council	L	F	Y
Ms Tiurida Hutabarat	Protestant Christian Batak Church	L	F	
Mr Su-Hong Lim	Presbyterian Church in Taiwan	L	M	Y
Rev. John Gilmore	NCC Australia	O	M	
Ms Hannah Manickyam Cassandra Mesa	Anglican Church in Aotearoa, New Zealand, and Polynesia	L	F	
<b>PROGRAMME COMMITTEE CHAIRPERSON</b>				
H.G. Dr Kuriakose Mor Theophilose Metropolitan	Malankara Jacobite Syrian Orthodox Church	O	M	
Total: 20 Male: 12 (Ordained: 11, Youth, Lay: 1) Female: 8 (Ordained: 1, Lay: 7, Youth, Lay: 2)				

*Key: O/L = Ordained/Lay; M/F = Male/Female; Y = Youth*

## **b. CCA's Future Directions**

It was suggested that a policy be developed to ensure the participation and representation of the youth, especially in the decision-making body of CCA.

A general discussion was held on the issues that should be taken into account (e.g., national regulations on the registration of international NGOs, national finance regulations, visas, and accessibility) when considering a new location for the CCA offices and the best way to take forward the consideration of this issue. The issue will return for determination at a later session.

## **XXII. Worship**

Jerusalem Mar Thoma Church

Evening worship was led by the Asian Ecumenical Women's Assembly

Dinner

## **Tuesday, 3 October 2023 (Day 6)**

## **XXIII. Morning Worship**

Jerusalem Mar Thoma Church

The Worship was led by Rev. Dr Wen Ge, Ms Lila Mridha, and Rt. Rev. Steven Lawrence.

## **XXIV. Business Session #6**

The session was held in the Juhanon Mar Thoma Hall

The session was moderated by Bishop Dhiloraj Canagasabey and Bishop Reuel Norman Marigza.

### **a. Minutes Reading Committee**

**GA 2023/13** *The Minutes Secretaries presented the Report on the Minutes from the General Assembly from Monday (2 October) which was reviewed and found to be an accurate record of the meeting.*

### **b. Future Directions – Location of CCA Office**

**GA 2023/14** *The 15<sup>th</sup> General Assembly authorises the Executive Committee to*

- a. *take into account matters related to employment visa restrictions, currency exchanges, and transactions to overseas, and develop a comprehensive process through which to assess suitable locations for the CCA office;*
- b. *include in the process a transparent assessment tool that makes clear how each possible location meets the pre-determined selection criteria, e.g., an assessment grid;*
- c. *the selection criteria include, but are not limited to, national regulations on the registration of international NGOs, national finance regulations, and visa requirements for staff;*
- d. *consult with member Churches and Councils on the question of where the CCA office should be located;*
- e. *take into account the reports of the 15<sup>th</sup> Assembly's Future Directions groups that speak to this issue;*
- f. *make the decision about the location of the CCA office and related matters; and*
- g. *implement those decisions.*

### **c. Public Issues Committee**

Rev. John Gilmore and Mr Mervin Sol H. Toquero presented the final report of the Public Issues Committee.

Areas that were addressed after comments received yesterday were Australia's First Peoples' Voice; 70 Years after the Armistice: A Statement for Reconciliation and Peace on the Korean Peninsula; Human Dignity and the Wholeness of Life; Human Trafficking and Forced Migration; and Continuing Human Rights and Violations in the Philippines. In addition, the situation in Nagorno-Karabakh was also addressed.

**GA 2023/15** *The 15<sup>th</sup> General Assembly approved the proposals as presented by the Public Issues Committee.*

### **Concern for violence in Manipur and Sudan**

**GA 2023/16** *The 15<sup>th</sup> General Assembly adopts the following statement on Manipur:*



*The CCA member churches and councils note with heavy hearts the continuing violence and suffering in Manipur and pray for peace and reconciliation to be established.*

**GA 2023/17**     *The 15<sup>th</sup> General Assembly adopts the following statement on Sudan:*

*We have heard of the pain and suffering of the people of Sudan and the impact of war on so many. The members of the CCA pray for an end to the conflict and a restoration of peace and freedom.*

#### **d. Statement of the Asian Ecumenical Youth Assembly**

Ms Kay Catherine Almario presented the report with the focus “We have a vision of Heaven on Earth”. There was an affirmation of the willingness and ability of young people to offer leadership and new insights to meet the challenges facing the church and society at this time. The report challenged church leaders to make this possible and to institute processes and practices that provided leadership opportunities for young people.

**GA 2023/18**     *The report was received.*

#### **e. Statement of the Asian Ecumenical Women’s Pre-Assembly (AEWA)**

Ms Joy Han presented the report under the heading “Asian Ecumenical Women: Journeying Towards the Renewal and Restoration of God’s Creation”. The report acknowledged that women disproportionately suffer the consequences of climate change and environmental degradation and are not usually in the societal place to do anything about the causes. The report outlined the practical steps that the churches can take to support the renewal and restoration of God’s creation.

**GA 2023/19**     *The report was received.*

#### **f. CCA Programme Evaluation Report**

**GA 2023/20**     *The 15<sup>th</sup> General Assembly receives the Evaluation Report circulated earlier and authorises the Executive Committee to review the recommendations and take any necessary follow-up.*

#### **g. Concluding Remarks by:**

**Vice Moderator, Bishop Reuel Norman Marigza**

- Encouragement for new participants in the CCA to read previous minutes to assist with their orientation and participation when they come to their first Assembly.
- Evaluate consensus process used at this Assembly and how to improve it.
- Get recommendations on programme directions from the Secretariat.
- Affirmed the Student Christian Movement and the role it plays in developing ecumenical leaders.
- Bishop Dhiloraj Canagasabey was specifically thanked for his willingness to step into the role of Moderator under such unfortunate circumstances and to rise to the leadership required for the times.
- He thanked the Assembly for its trust in electing him to be the Moderator after the 15<sup>th</sup> Assembly and sought the prayers of the member Churches and Councils. He encouraged those present to continue their support and advocacy for the work of the CCA and to stay connected through the website, social media, and participation in programmes.

#### **General Secretary, Dr Mathews George Chunakara**

- Dr Mathews George Chunakara drew attention to the places where it is possible to access information on past discussions and decisions of the CCA.
- The stewards (there were nearly 50) and coordinators of the stewards were introduced and thanked for their significant contribution to the success of the Assembly.
- Special thanks were given to the staff of the CCA for their hard work over many months as well as during the days of the Pre-Assembly and the Assembly.
- Appreciation was expressed to the five member churches of CCA from Kerala for their generous support, encouragement and hospitality that was offered from the very beginning of conversations right through to the end of the Assembly, and for the coordination by NCCI.
- The valuable work of the Local Host, Reception, Food and Refreshment Committees, Worship Coordinators and Team, the leaders who planned the Pre-Assembly events, the Media and Communications team, the medical support team and the co-opted staff were acknowledged. Special mention was made of, and expression of sincere gratitude for, the Jerusalem Mar Thoma Church and its priests, parish committee, and leaders who provided so much support and hospitality. The General Secretary noted the significant support extended by the government

officials, including the police, who have cooperated to make the Assembly events run smoothly within the wider social context.

- Dr Mathews George Chunakara thanked the Officers and the outgoing Executive Committee for their collaborative and positive support to him and for their contribution to the work of the CCA.
- The General Secretary concluded by pointing to a significant facet of Indian culture, which views meeting places and parting places as sacred places. This is so for the members of the Assembly who are now making Kottayam a sacred place as we have met and parted from here.

Thanks were expressed from the floor for the work of the CCA General Secretary, Dr Mathews George Chunakara and this was supported with warm applause.

### **Moderator, Bishop Dhiloraj Canagasabey**

- The Moderator thanked the delegates and participants for their contribution to the meeting of the 15<sup>th</sup> Assembly, and the outgoing Executive Committee and Officers for their work and support over the last eight years.

Bishop Dhiloraj Canagasabey closed the meeting in prayer and the session concluded with the singing of the doxology.

Tea and Coffee Break

### **XXV. Closing Worship and Holy Communion Including the Installation of New Officers and Executive Committee**

Jerusalem Mar Thoma Church

The Worship team and representatives from the Assembly led the closing worship. The Most Rev. Joel Ocop Porlares, the Obispo Maximo of the Iglesia Filipina Independiente, delivered the homily. The co-celebrants were Rev. Arniyati Dangga Mesa (Gereja Kristen Sumba), the Very Rev. Fr M.P. George Cor Episcopa (Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church), Rev. Shibu Mathew (Malankara Mar Thoma Syrian Church), Rev. Fr Jerry Kurian (Malankara Jacobite Syrian Orthodox Church), and Rev. Viji Varghese (Church of South India).

The installation of the incoming CCA Officers and the Executive Committee was led by the outgoing Acting Moderator Bishop Dhiloraj Canagasabey.

HG Dr Kuriakose Mor Theophilose Metropolitan thanked the worship team and the choir.

## **List of Parishes Visited by Assembly Participants**

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1. Bethel Mar Thoma Church, Kollad
2. CSI Ascension Church, Collectorate
3. CSI Christ Cathedral, Melukavu
4. CSI Holy Trinity Cathedral
5. CSI St. Andrews Church, Panimattom
6. CSI St. John the Baptist Church, Pallom
7. CSI St. Paul's, Vadavathoor
8. CSI St. Thomos Church, S. H. Mount
9. Mar Aprem Orthodox Church, Pariyaram
10. Mar Elia Cathedral, Kottayam
11. Mar Gregorious Orthodox Church, Njaliyakuzhy
12. Mar Kuriakose Dayara, Pambady
13. Mor Aphrem JSC, Vadavathoor
14. Mor Gregorian JSC, Thoothooty
15. Sleebea Orthodox Church, Kottayam
16. St George Orthodox Church, Areeparambu
17. St James Orthodox Church, Thirukoothamangalam
18. St Mary's Cheriapally, Kottayam
19. St Mary's Orthodox Church, Amayannoor
20. St Mary's Orthodox Church, Vakathanam
21. St Marys JSC, Manganam
22. St Pauls Orthodox Church, Pallom
23. St Peters Orthodox Church, Pariyaram
24. St Thomas Orthodox Church, Meenadom
25. St Thomas Orthodox Church, South Pambady
26. St. Adais JSC, Nalunnackal
27. St. Johns JSC, Kumarakom
28. St. Marys Knanaya Valiapalli
29. St. Marys Panampady
30. St. Mary's JSC, Kurichy
31. Vallikattu Dayara, Vakathanam
32. Devalokam Aramana Chapel
33. Old Seminary Chapel
34. St Thomas Orthodox Church, Amayannoor
35. St Peters Orthodox Church, Vazhoor
36. Mar Baselious Dayara, Njaliyakuzhy
37. Jerusalam Mar Thoma Church
38. St Thomas Orthodox Church, Anthoory
39. St Thomas Orthodox Church, Anthooty
40. St Peters Mar Thoma Church, Muttambolom
41. St Luke's Mar Thoma Church, Kalathipadi
42. St John's Mar Thoma, Amalagiri
43. St Thomas Mar Thoma Church, Karukachal

## List of Cultural Programmes Presented at Asian Ecumenical Festival

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Performer(s)	Performances
1. Rev. M. P. George Cor Episcopa	Syrian Prayer Chant
2. Diocese of East Kerala, Church of South India	<i>Muthuvan</i> community's tribal dance
3. Ms Sreya Anna Joseph	Syrian Devotional Song
4. Assembly participants from Republic of Korea	Korean Cultural Song- <i>Arirang</i>
5. Ms Neethu Mary Mammen	Kerala Solo Fusion Dance
6. Mr Kunjimon and Team	<i>Parunthattam</i> (Eagle's dance) – an ancient ritual folk dance
7. BCM College Students	<i>Mohiniyattam</i> – one of the classical dances of India
8. BCM College Students	<i>Thiruvathirakkali</i> – the folk dance of <i>Onam</i> festival
9. BCM College Students	<i>Margamkali</i> – an ancient cultural performance of the St Thomas Christian community in Kerala, India
10. AEI 2023 Participants	Hindi Christian Song and Dance
11. Assembly participants from Indonesia	Indonesian Cultural Song
12. Dynamic Action Team	People's song on Eco Spirituality

## **List of Assembly Participants**

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### **I. Voting Delegates**

#### **A. CCA Officers**

1. Rt Rev. Dhiloraj Canagasabey, Moderator (acting), Church of Ceylon in Sri Lanka
2. Bishop Reuel Norman Marigza, Vice-Moderator (acting), United Church of Christ in the Philippines
3. Augustine Dipak Karmakar, Treasurer, Church of Bangladesh
4. Dr Mathews George Chunakara, General Secretary, Malankara Mar Thoma Syrian Church in India

#### **B. Delegates of Member Churches and Councils**

### **Delegates of Member Churches**

#### **Anglican Church in Aotearoa, New Zealand and Polynesia**

5. Hannah Manickyam Cassandra Mesa
6. Loini Simeti

#### **Anglican Church of Australia**

7. Bishop Peter Derrick James Stuart

#### **Armenian Orthodox Church of Iran**

8. Archbishop Dikran Sebouh Sarkissian
9. Dn. Ani Christy Manvelian

#### **Bangladesh Baptist Church Sangha**

10. Christopher Adhikari

#### **Church of Ceylon**

11. Rev. David Nigel Perry Brohier

#### **Church of Christ in Thailand**

12. Rev. Dr Pradit Takerngrangsarit
13. Nubpron Panya

#### **Church of North India**

14. Rev. Dr Ajith Kumar
15. Rev. Edith Martin
16. Joshua Rathnam

### **Church of South India**

- 17. Rt Rev. V. S. Francis
- 18. Keren Samuel
- 19. Dr E. Mathew Eben

### **Coptic Orthodox Church/ Diocese of Sydney and Affiliated Regions**

- 20. Bishop Daniel

### **Evangelical Christian Church in Bangladesh**

- 21. Rev. Peklian Bawm

### **Evangelical Lutheran Church in Malaysia**

- 22. Rt Rev. Steven Lawrence

### **Gereja Batak Karo Protestan (GBKP) / Karo Batak Protestant Church**

- 23. Rev. Christopher Sinulingga

### **Gereja Isa Almasih (GIA) / The Church of Jesus Christ in Indonesia**

- 24. Rosiana Indah Purnomo

### **Gereja Kristen Injili di Tanah Papua (GKI Tanah Papua) / Evangelical Christian Church in Tanah Papua**

- 25. Rev. Albert Bertus Rumwaropen
- 26. Donaltus Lus Ludim Rumbesu
- 27. Clara Yakomina Okoka

### **Gereja Kristen Jawa (GKJ) / Javanese Christian Churches**

- 28. Rev. Hananto Kusumo
- 29. Ruth Ivory Dewi Sulistyaningtyas

### **Gereja Kristen Jawi Wetan (GKJW) / Christian Church of Eastern Java**

- 30. Rev. Natael Hermawan Prianto

### **Gereja Kristen Pasundan (GKP) / Pasundan Christian Church**

- 31. Rev. Tongam Adama Antonius Sihite

### **Gereja Kristen Protestan Simalungun(GKPS) / Simalungun Protestant Christian Church**

- 32. Rev. Dr Paul Ulrich Munthe



**Gereja Kristen Sulawesi Tengah (GKST) /  
Central Sulawesi Christian Church**

33. Rev. Dr Tertius Yunias Lantigimo

**Gereja Kristen Sumba/Christian Church of Sumba**

34. Rev. Arniyati Dangga Mesa

**Gereja Masehi Injili di Bolaang Mongondow (GMIBM)**

35. Rev. Fekky Wenny Kamasaan  
36. Rev. Stien Keni

**Gereja Masehi Injili di Timor (GMIT) /  
Protestant Evangelical Church in Timor**

37. Rev. Gusti Arianto B. Menoh  
38. Marsal Daryance Faah  
39. Mutiara Anastasya Doek  
40. Rev. Silvana Alexandra Manafe

**Gereja Masehi Injili Halmahera (GMIH) /  
The Evangelical Christian Church in Halmahera**

41. Rev. Abram Ugu  
42. Rev. Dr Demianus Ice

**Gereja Masehi Injili Minahasa (GMIM) /  
The Christian Evangelical Church in Minahasa**

43. Rev. Dr Hein Arina  
44. Dn. Windy Yessy Veronica Lucas  
45. Yoel Yesaya Yedidah Sompie

**Gereja Masehi Injili Sangihe Talaud (GMIST) /  
Evangelical Church of Sangihe Talaud**

46. Rev. Welman Boba

**Gereja Methodist Indonesia (GMI) /  
The Methodist Church of Indonesia**

47. Rev. Apriani Magdalena Sibarani

**Gereja Protestan di Indonesia Bagian Barat (GPIB) /  
The Protestant Church in Western Part of Indonesia**

48. Stephanus Waraney Suwu  
49. Cindy Quartyamina Koan  
50. Rev. Jimmy Marcos Immanuel

### **Gereja Protestan Maluku (GPM) / The Protestant Church in Maluku**

- 51. Rev. Elifas Tomix Maspaitella
- 52. Rev. Izak Sacharias Sapulette
- 53. Agnes Souisa

### **Gereja Toraja / Toraja Church**

- 54. Rev. Alfred Y. Rantedatu Anggu
- 55. Rev. Christian Tanduk Langi

### **Hong Kong Council of the Church of Christ China**

- 56. Rev. Ko Kwok Hung

### **Huria Kristen Batak Protestan (HKBP) / Batak Protestant Christian Church**

- 57. Rev. Dr Victor Tinambunan
- 58. Rev. Dr Deonal Sinaga
- 59. Tiurida Hutabarat
- 60. Junita Silalahi

### **Huria Kristen Indonesia (HKI) / The Indonesian Christian Church**

- 61. Andrian Simbolon

### **Iglesia Evangelica Metodista en Las Islas Filipinas (Evangelical Methodist Church in the Philippines)**

- 62. Rev. Oscar Cuevas, Jr.

### **Iglesia Filipina Independiente (Philippine Independent Church)**

- 63. The Most Rev. Joel Ocop Porlares
- 64. The Very Rev. Eleuterio J. Revollido
- 65. Rt Rev. Emelyn G. Dacuycuy
- 66. Vaughn Geuseppe Alviar

### **Igreja Protestante iha Timor Lorosa'e (IPTL)**

- 67. Rev. Levi Vasconcelos Pinto

### **Kerapatan Gereja Protestan Minahasa (KGPM) / The Union of Minahasa Protestant Church**

- 68. Rev. Francky Riko Londa

### **Korean Christian Church in Japan**

- 69. Rev. Zion Chung

### **Korean Methodist Church**

- 70. Rev. Dr Jonggoo Kim
- 71. Rev. Dr Dowoong Park
- 72. Subeen Kang

### **Lao Evangelical Church**

- 73. Rev. Dethsacda Aphayamath
- 74. Rev. Chinda Soukpaseth

### **Malabar Independent Syrian Church**

- 75. H.G. Cyril Mar Baselios I

### **Malankara Jacobite Syrian Orthodox Church**

- 76. H.G. Dr Kuriakose Mor Theophilose Metropolitan
- 77. Fr Jerry Kurian Kodyattu
- 78. Meenu Rabecca Mathai
- 79. Tharun Kurian Alex

### **Malankara Mar Thoma Syrian Church in India**

- 80. Rt Rev. Dr Mathews Mar Makarios Episcopa
- 81. Very Rev. Easow Mathew
- 82. Neethu M Mammen
- 83. Shajan M. George

### **Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church**

- 84. H.G. Dr Abraham Mar Seraphim Metropolitan
- 85. Dr Thomas Kuruvilla
- 86. Karunyapriya Maryam Mathews
- 87. Abel Thomas Denny

### **Mara Evangelical Church**

- 88. Rev. Dr Zo Dong

### **Methodist Church in India**

- 89. Bishop Subodh Chandra Mondal
- 90. Basanti Biswas
- 91. Roderick Romel

### **Methodist Church of Lower Myanmar**

- 92. Rev. Tay Za Win

### **Methodist Church of New Zealand/ Te Haahi Weteriana o Aotearoa**

93. Rev. Peter Taylor

### **Methodist Church of Sri Lanka**

94. Rev. William Premkumar Ebenezer Joseph

### **Myanmar Baptist Convention**

95. Rev. Dr Thang Cin Lian  
96. Rev. Dr Aye New  
97. Nang Thu Zar Mon  
98. Saw Dah Eh Bway Doh Htoo

### **Nippon Sei Ko Kai/ The Anglican Episcopal Church in Japan**

99. The Revd Jesse Shinichi Yahagi

### **Persatuan Gereja Gereja Kristen Muria Indonesia (GKMI) / United Muria Christian Churches of Indonesia**

100. Risma Kusyati Lumalessil

### **Presbyterian Church in Taiwan**

101. Su-Hong Lim  
102. Yueh-Wen Lu

### **Presbyterian Church in the Republic of Korea**

103. Rev. Dr Chang Ju Kim  
104. Yeeun So

### **Presbyterian Church of India**

105. Rev. B. Reynoldson Kharnaier  
106. Immanuel Lalrampanmawia  
107. Monsing Suchiang  
108. Wellorich Sohkhlet

### **Presbyterian Church of Korea**

109. Rev. Dr Yoontae Kim  
110. Rev. Dr Seonyi Lee  
111. Dr Youngmi Cho  
112. Chang Gee Lee

### **Presbyterian Church of Myanmar**

113. Rev. Tha Lian Fai

### **Sheng Kung Hui Hong Kong (Anglican Church)**

114. The Rev. Poon Ching Hang Amos

### **The Episcopal Church in the Philippines**

115. Romelyn D. Bautista  
116. Rev. Way-Yaan M. Apil

### **United Church of Christ in the Philippines**

117. Bishop Feliciano Tenchavez  
118. Rev. Dr George A. Lungay  
119. Rev. Rannieh B. Mercado  
120. Emelyn Kathara Bartulaba Suniga

### **United Evangelical Lutheran Church in India**

121. Rev. Dr A. Joshuva Peter  
122. Rev. S. Samuel Logan Ratnaraj  
123. Sharon Milton  
124. Zamkhan Pau

### **United Methodist Church in the Philippines**

125. Rev. Dr Liberato C. Bautista  
126. Dn. Blessy Grace M. De Leon

### **Uniting Church in Australia**

127. Rev. Allan Kickett  
128. Joy Han  
129. Rev. Prof. Vicky Balabanski

### **Delegates of Member Councils**

#### **Communion of Churches in Indonesia**

130. Rev. Dr Jacklevyn Frits Manuputty  
131. Panca Parulian Simanjuntak

#### **Council of Churches of Malaysia**

132. Dr Anna Alisha Mathew Simon  
133. Vishal Sam Mohan

### **Hong Kong Christian Council**

134. Rev. Chan Kwok Keung

### **Kampuchea Christian Council**

135. Rev. Sok Nev  
136. Oungchay Soklay  
137. Dr Sovy Dymeas  
138. Rev. Uy Dy

### **Myanmar Council of Churches**

139. Bishop Myan San  
140. Rev. Mahn Palmerston  
141. Kyi Kyi Win  
142. Nant Ruth Shwe Sin Nyein Aye

### **National Christian Council in Japan**

143. Rev. Dr Kim Sungjae

### **National Christian Council of Sri Lanka**

144. Rev. Sujithar Sivanayagam  
145. Rev. Saman Perera  
146. Col. Nihal Hettiarachchi  
147. Trudy Hepshiba Bandara

### **National Council of Churches in Australia**

148. Rev. John Charles Gilmore  
149. Oliver Gorial Diryawish Slewa

### **National Council of Churches in Bangladesh**

150. Rev. David Anirudha Das  
151. Bishop Simon R. Biswas  
152. Imran Mrong

### **National Council of Churches in India**

153. Rev. Asir Ebenezer David  
154. Nune Rajesh  
155. Nishant Sidh  
156. Rev. Jyoti Singh

### **National Council of Churches in Korea**

- 157. Rev. Dr Won Bin Park
- 158. Kim Yumi
- 159. Rev. Dr Kim Min Ji

### **National Council of Churches in the Philippines**

- 160. Ms Minnie Anne M. Calub
- 161. Dr Gay B. Manodon
- 162. Ma. Kay Cathrine Almario
- 163. Mervin Sol H. Toquero

### **National Council of Churches of Taiwan**

- 164. Rev. Fan-Wei Liang

### **Te Runanga Whakawhanaunga I Nga Hahi (Māori Council of Churches)**

- 165. Rev. Tara Tautari
- 166. Rowan Tautari
- 167. Puspa Barua

## **II. Non-Voting Delegates**

### **CCA Executive Committee Members (Out-going)**

- 168. Rev. Huang Shin-Yi, Presbyterian Church in Taiwan
- 169. Rev. Moises Antonio Da Silva, Igreja Protestante iha Timor Lorosa'e in Timor Leste
- 170. Nirmala Gurung, National Council of Churches in Nepal
- 171. Supaporn Yarnasarn, Church of Christ in Thailand
- 172. Rev. Terence Corkin, Uniting Church in Australia
- 173. Win Htut Thar Kyi, Myanmar Baptist Convention

### **Ecumenical Partners and Related Organisations**

- 174. Andreas Hans Dybkjaer-Andersson, Areopagos
- 175. Dr Andrea Maria Mann, Anglican Church of Canada
- 176. Rev. Frida Falk, Church of Sweden
- 177. Sheila Mallik, Church of Sweden
- 178. Rev. Dr Risto Jukko, Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland
- 179. Rev. Dr Atenjemba Wati Longchar, Foundation for Theological Education in South East Asia (FTESEA)
- 180. Dr Sarosh Koshy, Global Ministries (Disciples of Christ and United Church of Christ)
- 181. Dr Liza Bano Lamis, International Committee for the Fellowship of the Least Coin (ICFLC)



182. Dn. Kerry Ruth Scarlett, Methodist Church in Britain
183. Sheila Avril Norris, Methodist Church in Britain
184. Rev. Catherine Sujean Chang, Presbyterian Church USA – World Mission
185. Rev. Jieun Kim Han, Presbyterian Church USA – World Mission
186. Metropolitan Sevryuk Anton, Russian Orthodox Church Moscow Patriarchate
187. Rev. Alexander Ershov, Russian Orthodox Church Moscow Patriarchate
188. Hieromonk Igumnov Anton, Russian Orthodox Church Moscow Patriarchate
189. Patricia Kathryn Talbot, The United Church of Canada
190. Dn. Darlene Marquez Caramanzana, The United Methodist Church – General Board of Global Ministries
191. Rev. Dr Vincent Rajkumar, World Association for Christian Communication (WACC)
192. Dr Manoj Kurian, World Council of Churches (WCC)
193. Yowanda Yonggara, World Student Christian Federation (WSCF)

### **Guests**

194. Most Rev. Dr Francis Serrao, Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC)
195. Rev. Dr Henriette Hutabarat Lebang, Former General Secretary, CCA (2010-2015)
196. Rev. Dr Prawate Khid-Arn, Former General Secretary, CCA (2005-2010)
197. Rev. Dr Eui Sig Kim, Presbyterian Church of Korea (PCK)

### **Resource Persons**

198. Rev. Prof. Dr Jerry Pillay, World Council of Churches (WCC)
199. Aan Sasono, PLHIV- Indonesia
200. Rev. Dr Arul Dhas Thanka Nadar, Christian Medical College-Vellore
201. Asai Soror, Council of Baptist Church in North East India (CBCNEI)
202. Dr Citra Fitri Agustina, YARSI/ Nahdlatul Ulama
203. Rev. Prof. Dr Dietrich Werner-Dörfel, Gossner Mission. Humboldt University Berlin
204. Bishop Feliciano Tenchavez, United Church of Christ in the Philippines

205. Rev. Dr Ferdinand Anno, Union Christian College
206. Hiu Fan Chung, The Korea Christian Environmental Movement Solidarity for Integrity of Creation
207. Rev. Idan Topno, Gossner Evangelical Lutheran Church
208. Rev. Jaehak An, Life Giving Agriculture (LGA) Asia
209. Dr John Suresh, Participatory Learning Action Network and Training (PLANT)
210. Rev. Jollify Binti Daniel, Basel Christian Church of Malaysia (BCCM)
211. Dr Judy Berinai, Sabah Theological Seminary
212. Juliate Keya Malakar, Christian Commission for Development in Bangladesh (CCDB)
213. Karen Erina Puimera, Protestant Church in Western Indonesia
214. Ven. Kekirawe Sudassana Thero, University of Kelaniya
215. Rev. Kyeong Ho Han, Life Giving Agriculture (LGA) Asia
216. Md. Foezullah Talukder, Christian Commission for Development in Bangladesh (CCDB)
217. Swami Narasimhananda, Ramakrishna Mission
218. Ven. Ngodup Dorji, Longchenpa Center, Commission for Religious Organization of Bhutan
219. Rev. Dr Raj Bharat Patta, AELC/Methodist Church in Great Britain
220. Rev. Dr Rajanugraham Daniel Premkumar, Life Giving Agriculture (LGA) Asia
221. Dr Renji Mathew, Believers Church Medical College Hospital
222. Dr Sardar Sajjan Singh, Sikh Heritage Foundation Hyderabad Deccan
223. Dr Swamiji Swasti Shree Bhattaraka Charukeerthi, Shree Jain Math Moodbidri
224. Rev. Prof. Dr V.V. Thomas, The United Theological College (UTC)
225. Yusmiati Vistamika Wangka, TTM Hong Kong
226. Dayabai, Indian Social Activist

### **Registered Participants from CCA Member Churches, Councils and Ecumenical Organisations**

227. A. Nishanthi Kumari, Church of Ceylon
228. A. Regina Amalraj, Kerala United Theological Seminary
229. Abanoub Attalla, Rev., National Council of Churches Australia
230. Abhishek Abraham Mathews, Orthodox Theological Seminary

231. Abin Samuel, Orthodox Theological Seminary
232. Abraham K. Samuel, Orthodox Theological Seminary
233. Adam S. Suthagar, Council of Churches of Malaysia
234. Ajo Mathew, Kerala United Theological Seminary
235. Ajo Varghese Abraham, Mar Thoma Theological Seminary
236. Alan Kurian Sabu, Dn., Malankara Syrian Orthodox Theological Seminary
237. Alan Thomas Mathew, Mar Thoma Theological Seminary
238. Aldrin Ngamlai, Rev., Federated Faculty for Research in Religion and Culture
239. Alison May Overeem, Uniting Church in Australia
240. Alvin John Joseph, Malankara Syrian Orthodox Theological Seminary
241. An Wei Tan, Rev., Presbyterian Church of Korea
242. Andreas Mulyadi, Rev., Gereja Isa Almasih
243. Ankith Sabu, Dn, Malankara Syrian Orthodox Theological Seminary
244. Anoop Jacob Abraham, Mar Thoma Theological Seminary
245. Antony Tuhin Mridha, National Council of Churches in Bangladesh
246. Aquila Ramdinthari, Kerala United Theological Seminary
247. Asher John, Orthodox Theological Seminary
248. Ashil T Alias, Orthodox Theological Seminary
249. Ashwin Jacob Thomas, Mar Thoma Theological Seminary
250. Aswin Fernandis, Fr., Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church
251. Athul Abraham, Kerala United Theological Seminary
252. Aye Chan Moe, The Church of the Province of Myanmar
253. Basil Baby, Malankara Syrian Orthodox Theological Seminary
254. Basil Kuriakose, Malankara Syrian Orthodox Theological Seminary
255. Basil Sabu, Malankara Syrian Orthodox Theological Seminary
256. Basil Saji Zacharia, Orthodox Theological Seminary
257. Bibin Andrews, Malankara Knanaya Syrian Orthodox Church in Kottayam
258. Bijesh Philip, FrmDr, Orthodox Theological Seminary
259. Binson Jacob, Malankara Mar Thoma Syrian Church
260. Bohyun Kim, Rev., Presbyterian Church of Korea
261. Budi Cahyono Hartono, Rev., Gereja Isa Almasih
262. Chih-Mei Tang, Presbyterian Church in Taiwan
263. Christopher David, Rev., Church of South India
264. Desiana, Rev., Gereja Masehi Injili di Timor (GMIT)
265. Desemberina Loura Aipassa, Rev., Gereja Protestan Maluku

266. Dinka Nehemia Utomo, Rev., Gereja Protestan di Indonesia Bagian Barat (GPIB)
267. Dong Hwa Tae, Rev., Korean Methodist Church
268. Dung Nguyen, Rev., Justified Baptist Church Vietnam
269. Edwin Cyriac, Malankara Syrian Orthodox Theological Seminary
270. Eldo Johny, Dn., Malankara Syrian Orthodox Theological Seminary
271. Emin Zacharia Alex, Orthodox Theological Seminary
272. Francis Devasia, Malankara Mar Thoma Syrian Church
273. Gavidy Shethu S. Naik, Church of South India
274. Geevan George Skariah, Orthodox Theological Seminary
275. Genews C. Providencia, United Church of Christ in the Philippines
276. George Zachariah, Rev. Dr, Methodist Church of New Zealand
277. Gigi Mathews, Malankara Mar Thoma Syrian Church
278. Gomar Gultom, Rev., Communion of Churches in Indonesia
279. Greeshma Baby, Kerala United Theological Seminary
280. Gregory K Johns, Orthodox Theological Seminary
281. Gregory Roy Dn., Orthodox Theological Seminary
282. Grigin J. Tholath, Dn., Kerala United Theological Seminary
283. Hanseul Lee, Korean Methodist Church
284. Hemmings Herman, Kerala United Theological Seminary
285. Hongcheol Ahn, Rev., Dr, Presbyterian Church of Korea
286. Jacob Mathew, Rev. Dr, Federated Faculty for Research in Religion and Culture
287. Jacob Pappaia Leo Bashyam, United Kingdom
288. Jacub Sutisna, Rev. Dr, Communion of Churches in Indonesia
289. James Samuel, Malankara Mar Thoma Syrian Church
290. Jennings Ranjith, Kerala United Theological Seminary
291. Jeo Joseph, Fr, Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church
292. Jerrin Joy, Malankara Jacobite Syrian Orthodox Church
293. Jeseena P. Joseph, Sr., Federated Faculty for Research in Religion and Culture
294. Jesaia Kathie, Kerala United Theological Seminary
295. Jibin Saji, Dn., Orthodox Theological Seminary
296. Jickson Varghese, Malankara Jacobite Syrian Orthodox Church
297. Jiwon Kim, Korean Methodist Church
298. Joannajothy Paranjothy, Tamil Methodist Church, Malaysia
299. Jobin Varghese, Fr, Federated Faculty for Research in Religion and Culture

300. Joby Varughese, Dn., Orthodox Theological Seminary
301. Joel John, Mar Thoma Theological Seminary
302. John Philip Attatharayil, Rev. Dr, Mar Thoma Theological Seminary
303. John Philip P, Rev., Mar Thoma Theological Seminary
304. John Thomas Karingattil, Fr Dr, Federated Faculty for Research in Religion and Culture
305. John Varghese, Fr, Federated Faculty for Research in Religion and Culture
306. Jongseng Kim, Rev., Dr, National Council of Churches in Korea
307. Jose John, Fr Dr, Orthodox Theological Seminary
308. Joseph Varghese, Prof, Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church
309. Junyoung Kim, Life Giving Agriculture (LGA) Asia
310. Justin A. Thomas, Mar Thoma Theological Seminary
311. Kang Hee Han, Rev., Dr, Presbyterian Church in the Republic of Korea
312. Keehoon Song, Rev., Presbyterian Church of Korea
313. Kenneth M. Dhanapala, The Theological College of Lanka
314. Kolapudi Grace Angel, Kerala United Theological Seminary
315. Kongala John Skylab, Rev, Federated Faculty for Research in Religion and Culture
316. Kristianty Lumanta, Communion of Churches in Indonesia
317. Krupa Jyothi, Federated Faculty for Research in Religion and Culture
318. Kuriakose Kollannur, Fr Dr, Malankara Syrian Orthodox Theological Seminary
319. Lavin George Dn., Orthodox Theological Seminary
320. Libin Joy, Dn., Malankara Syrian Orthodox Theological Seminary
321. Lincy Johnson, Kerala United Theological Seminary
322. Linu L, Kerala United Theological Seminary
323. Mammen Joseph, Dn., Orthodox Theological Seminary
324. Mathew Abraham Varghese, Mar Thoma Theological Seminary
325. Mathew John, Rev., Malankara Mar Thoma Syrian Church
326. Mathew P Thomas, Orthodox Theological Seminary
327. Meita Wala, Gereja Masehi Injili Minahasa (GMIM)
328. Midhin Monachan, Malankara Syrian Orthodox Theological Seminary
329. Moncy Monachan, Mar Thoma Theological Seminary
330. Moni Kallenparambil, Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church
331. Mothy Varkey, Rev. Dr, Mar Thoma Theological Seminary
332. Nambyong Jeon, Rev., Korean Methodist Church

333. Naw Wine Mayble, Myanaung Myanmar Baptist Church
334. Neliana Santo Nope, Igreja Protestante iha Timor Lorosa'e (IPTL)
335. Nikolas Biswas, Canaan Baptist Church
336. Nilmini Sureka Goringe, Dr, Uniting Church in Australia
337. Ninan K. George, Fr., Orthodox Theological Seminary
338. Nithin Cherian Kurian, Malankara Mar Thoma Syrian Church
339. Nithin T. Mathew, Orthodox Theological Seminary
340. Oommen P. Abraham, Mar Thoma Theological Seminary
341. Ouy Yoisaykham, Lao Evangelical Church
342. Pangernungba Kechu, Dr, Oriental Theological Seminary
343. Philimon Koshy, Rev., Federated Faculty for Research in Religion and Culture
344. Prijin Pappachan, Dn., Orthodox Theological Seminary
345. Prince Devanandan, Rev., Anglican Church of Aotearoa New Zealand
346. Rajan Moses, Rev., Kerala United Theological Seminary
347. Rajeev Vadassery, Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church
348. Reji Mathew, Fr Dr, Orthodox Theological Seminary
349. Rejo Abraham Cherian, Mar Thoma Theological Seminary
350. Riju K. Reji, Malankara Syrian Orthodox Theological Seminary
351. Rino John, Mar Thoma Theological Seminary
352. Ritchu John Chirayil, Malankara Mar Thoma Syrian Church
353. Rony Rajan, Dn., Malankara Syrian Orthodox Theological Seminary
354. Roy Thomas, Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church
355. S. Joevert Samlin Jebez, Kerala United Theological Seminary
356. Sahana Rani Benya, United Evangelical Lutheran Churches in India
357. Sam Jose, Mar Thoma Theological Seminary
358. Sampathawaduge Harshini Sethsriya, Church of Ceylon
359. Sanoj Varghese, Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church
360. Santhosh T, Kerala United Theological Seminary
361. Saw Nehru, Pwo Kayin Theological Seminary
362. Saw Shwe Lin, Rev., Myanmar Council of Churches
363. Seong Cheol Lee, The Human Rights Center of the National Council of Churches in Korea
364. Seong Ung Ha, Rev., Ecumenical Youth Council in Korea
365. Seung Heon Ok, Korean Methodist Church
366. Seungmi Sim, Korean Methodist Church
367. Shaji P. John, Fr Dr, Orthodox Theological Seminary
368. Shaji Ulahannan Kurian, Orthodox Theological Seminary

369. Shalom M. John, Mar Thoma Theological Seminary
370. Shibu Mathew, Rev., Malankara Mar Thoma Syrian Church
371. Shin Young Yun, Rev., Dr, Presbyterian Church of Korea
372. Shybu JD, Kerala United Theological Seminary
373. Sabin M. Sunny, Dn., Malankara Syrian Orthodox Theological Seminary
374. Sabin Poullose, Malankara Syrian Orthodox Theological Seminary
375. Sijo T. Joseph, Dn., Orthodox Theological Seminary
376. Siju C Philip, Rev., Malankara Mar Thoma Syrian Church
377. Sit Tsz Lok Isaac, Divinity School of Chung Chi College, Chinese University of Hong Kong
378. Sofiya Mathew, Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church
379. Solomon David, Church of South India
380. Songhee Chai, Rev., Presbyterian Church of Korea
381. Sonu George Thomas, Mar Thoma Theological Seminary
382. Sonu Solomon, Kerala United Theological Seminary
383. Sonu Varghese Oommen, Mar Thoma Theological Seminary
384. Stephen C. Abraham, Mar Thoma Theological Seminary
385. Subin Lukose, Kerala United Theological Seminary
386. Sudipta Mondal, Methodist Church in India
387. Sungkook Park, Rev., Dr, Presbyterian Church in the Republic of Korea
388. Susheel C. Cheriyan, Rev, Mar Thoma Theological Seminary
389. Sybin Sunil, Malankara Syrian Orthodox Theological Seminary
390. Tangkamchi A. Sangma, Chang Baptist Church in Dimapur
391. Thejas Cheriyan, Dn., Malankara Syrian Orthodox Theological Seminary
392. Thomas Chacko, Rev. Dr, Mar Thoma Theological Seminary
393. Thomas Geevarghese, Fr., Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church
394. Tima Warni Pangaribuan, Batak Christian Protestant Church
395. Tino K. Thomas, Fr., Orthodox Theological Seminary
396. V. M. Mathew, Rev. Dr, Mar Thoma Theological Seminary
397. V. S. Varughese, Rev. Dr, Mar Thoma Theological Seminary
398. Vanlal Malsawmsangi, Kerala United Theological Seminary
399. Vethakani Vedhanayagam, Dr, Church of South India
400. Vethanbu Dasiah, Rev., Federated Faculty for Research in Religion and Culture
401. Viji Varghese Eapen, Rev., Church of South India
402. Vipul Battise, Rev, Federated Faculty for Research in Religion and Culture



- 403. Vivek Varghese, Dr, Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church
- 404. Warren Wilson, Rev., Nippon Sei Ko Kai/Anglican Episcopal Church in Japan
- 405. Won Young Lee, Rev., Life Giving Agriculture (LGA) Asia
- 406. Ywardhana Septiani Bulu, Toraja Church
- 407. Zachariah Mathew, Rev., Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church
- 408. Zachariah Vinu, Dn., Malankara Syrian Orthodox Theological Seminary

### **Accredited Media**

- 409. Mammen Varkki, Prof. Dr, People's Reporter
- 410. Mathew Koshy Punnackadu, Prof. Dr, New Vision for A Changing World
- 411. Neelam Gaikwad, National Council of Churches in India
- 412. Saem Chan Choi, Kidokongbo – PCK NEWS

### **CCA Staff**

- 413. Rev. Jung Eun Grace Moon
- 414. Dr Ronald Lalthanmawia
- 415. Arceli P. Bile
- 416. Arpa Yaichid
- 417. John Paul Devakumar
- 418. Klein Emperado
- 419. Nathi Schumann
- 420. Ruth Mathen
- 421. Hnin Wai Thi Aung (Mary)
- 422. Sha Mgwe La Ah Tha Pa (Samuel)
- 423. Yu-Ting Chiu (Amy)

### **CCA Co-opted Staff**

#### **Assembly Local Coordination**

- 424. Rev. Dr Abraham Mathew, National Council of Churches in India

#### **Worship**

- 425. Rev. Dr Ester Pudjo Widiasih, Jakarta Theological Seminary, Indonesia
- 426. Rev. Hyunju Lee, Presbyterian Church of Korea, South Korea
- 427. Rev. Mathews George, Dharma Jothy Theological Seminary, Faridabad, India

### **Pre-Assembly Youth**

- 428. Asher Noah Bokka, India
- 429. Ashish Mane, India
- 430. Natanael Budiman Elia, Indonesia
- 431. Yuliana Magdalena Benu, Indonesia

### **Stewards**

- 432. Abel Joshua Abey, India
- 433. Ribin John, India

### **Medical Aid Assistance**

- 434. Dr Selin Abraham, India
- 435. Dr Anna Mathew, India

### **Media and Communication**

- 436. Dr Paul Manalil, India
- 437. Prof. Philip Koshi, India
- 438. Rev. Sr Wantihun N Kynter, India
- 439. Alisha Reji, India
- 440. Krishna Shaji, India
- 441. Malavika M Nair, India
- 442. Silpa Ann Zachariah, India
- 443. Smriti Priyansha, India
- 444. Sundus Sali, India
- 445. Thushara Lily Manuel, India

### **Documentation**

- 446. Susan Jacob, India

### **Travel and Conveyance Coordination**

- 447. Jomon C. James, India
- 448. Roshin Pynummood, India

### **IT Consultant**

- 449. Mathew Chacko, Anther Technologies

### **Cultural Performance**

- 450. Jose Mammood, Dynamic Action
- 451. Raghu Eraviperur, Dynamic Action
- 452. Stanley Johnson, Dynamic Action
- 453. Suma Philip, Dynamic Action
- 454. Thankachen Karumadi, Dynamic Action

## Stewards

- 455. Akesch Chandrasiri, Church of Ceylon
- 456. Alfred Raj, Methodist Church in Malaysia
- 457. Anju Mary Jacob, Church of South India
- 458. Ashby Ooommen Sam, Church of South India
- 459. Bill Graham Kurivilla, Church of South India
- 460. Blessy Elsa Zachariah, Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church
- 461. Bussakorn Pawenapakorn, Church of Christ in Thailand
- 462. Chancy Mathew, Church of South India
- 463. Chanyoung Park, Ecumenical Youth Council in Korea
- 464. Christa Bessy Kurien, Malankara Mar Thoma Syrian Church
- 465. Defina C J, Malankara Jacobite Syrian Orthodox Church
- 466. Dona Mariam Roy, Malankara Jacobite Syrian Orthodox Church
- 467. Ester Dosa Abraham, Malankara Mar Thoma Syrian Church
- 468. Feba Mary Sabu, Malankara Mar Thoma Syrian Church
- 469. George Wesley, Church of South India
- 470. Hezron Tangke Saku Palu Pakan, Theological Seminary of Eastern Indonesia Makassar
- 471. Jacob Trent Ngileb, Episcopal Church in the Philippines
- 472. James Ayunan Aranay, Iglesia Filipina Independiente
- 473. Jinsa Elizabeth, Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church
- 474. John Jacob, Malankara Mar Thoma Syrian Church
- 475. Joseph James, Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church
- 476. Jeong Gyu Lee, Presbyterian Church in the Republic of Korea
- 477. JS Jeremiah Pandian, Church of South India
- 478. Kristianto Rua, Christian University of Indonesia in Toraja
- 479. Kwrwmdao Basumatary, Northern Evangelical Lutheran Church
- 480. Lijo Raju, Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church
- 481. Mithun Shibu, Malankara Mar Thoma Syrian Church
- 482. Mirin Mathew, Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church
- 483. Nedigorn Wongsamart, Church of Christ in Thailand
- 484. Nim Yan Lai, Divinity School of Chung Chi College
- 485. Praveen Daniel, Church of South India
- 486. Reuben T Mathew, Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church
- 487. Rijomon Abraham, Malankara Jacobite Syrian Orthodox Church
- 488. Shotabdi Hembrom, Bangladesh Baptist Church Sangha
- 489. Siman Garada, YMCA India
- 490. Sneha Susan, Malankara Jacobite Syrian Orthodox Church
- 491. Steffy Mariyam Varghese, Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church

492. Steve Gregory Varghese, Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church
493. Thomas Edison I, Church of South India
494. Vibin Varghese, Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church
495. Yu Cheuk Yan, Divinity School of Chung Chi College

### **Local Host Committee**

496. Rt Rev. Dr Abraham Mar Paulos, Malankara Mar Thoma Syrian Church
497. H. G. Metropolitan Dr Yakoob Mar Irenaios, Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church
498. Rt Rev. Dr Oommen George, Kerala Council of Churches
499. Rt Rev. Dr Malayil Sabu Koshy Cherian, Church of South India
500. Dr Dn. Anish K. Joy, Malankara Jacobite Syrian Orthodox Church
501. Fr Aswin Fernandes, Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church
502. Fr Biju P. Thomas, Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church
503. Gheever Mani Panakkal, Malabar Independent Syrian Church
504. Dr Jaisy Karingattil, Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church
505. Rev. Shibu Mathew, Malankara Mar Thoma Syrian Church
506. Cherian Varghese, Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church
507. Anoop C John, Malankara Mar Thoma Syrian Church
508. Rev. Fr K M Zachariah, Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church
509. Anish Punnen Peter, Malankara Mar Thoma Syrian Church
510. Prof. Dr Joseph Varghese, Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church
511. Prof. Dr John E. Mathew, Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church
512. Rev. Viji Varghese Eapen, Church of South India

## **Members of the Assembly Host Committee**

### **Patrons of the Assembly Host Committee**

Rt Rev. Dr K. Reuben Mark,  
*Church of South India*

His Grace Cyril Mar Baselios I,  
*Malabar Independent Syrian Church (Thozhiyoor)*

His Beatitude Aboon Mor Baselios Thomas I,  
*Malankara Jacobite Syrian Orthodox Church*

His Beatitude Dr Theodosius Mar Thoma Metropolitan,  
*Malankara Mar Thoma Syrian Church*

His Holiness Baselios Marthoma Mathews III Catholicos,  
*Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church*

**Core group of the Local Host Committee**  
(Constituted at the First Meeting of Representatives of  
CCA Member Churches in Kerala and the NCCI)

Rt Rev. Dr Abraham Mar Paulos, Malankara Mar Thoma Syrian Church  
His Grace Dr Yakoob Mar Irenaios, Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church  
His Grace Dr Kuriakose Mor Theophilose, Malankara Jacobite Syrian  
Orthodox Church

Rt Revd V.S. Francis, Church of South India

Rt Revd Dr Malayil Sabu Koshy Cherian, Church of South India

Rev. Asir Ebenezer David, National Council of Churches in India

Rt Rev. Dr Oommen George, Kerala Council of Churches

Dr Dn. Anish K. Joy, Malankara Jacobite Syrian Orthodox Church

Anoop C. John, Malankara Mar Thoma Syrian Church

Fr Aswin Fernandes, Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church

Fr Dr Biju P. Thomas, Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church

Rev. C. V. Symon, Malankara Mar Thoma Syrian Church

Gheever Mani Panakkal, Malabar Independent Syrian Church

Dr Jaisy Karingattil, Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church

Rajan Jacob, Malankara Mar Thoma Syrian Church

Rev. Shibu Mathew, Malankara Mar Thoma Syrian Church

**Sub-Committees of Local Host Committee**

**1. Travel and Visa of Delegates**

Rev Dr Abraham Mathew

**2. Reception Committee for Participants' Arrival and Departure**

Cherian Varghese

Dr Paul Manalil

**3. Local Transportation and Conveyance**

Mathew Zachariah

Jibu George

**4. Accommodation & Arrangements with Hotels**

Anoop C John

Dr Paul Manalil

C Thomas John

Cherian Varghese

John Cherian

## **5. Food and Refreshments at the Assembly**

Rev. Fr K M Zachariah  
Prof. Dr Issac Pampady  
Renjesh Chandy  
Nicy Sunny  
Arun Peter Thomas  
Mrs Jubi Mathew  
Alex K Issac

## **6. Registration of Assembly Participants**

Rev Shino Joseph

## **7. Venue Arrangements Main Meetings**

Anish Punnen Peter  
A G Korah  
Biju Ben  
Tomjith Markose

## **8. Venue Arrangements for “Churcha Groups”**

Prof. Dr Joseph Varghese  
Fr Dr John Thomas Karingattil

## **9. Participants’ Visit to Congregations on Sunday Morning (1 October 2023)**

Very Rev. Mathew John  
Fr Shiju Jose Chennikkara  
Fr K M. Zachariah  
Rev. Nelson Chacko  
Adv. P V Cheriyan

## **10. Asian Ecumenical Festival and Public Meeting (30 September 2023)**

Rev. Siju C Philip  
Anish Punnen Peter

## **11. Media and Communications**

Dr Paul Manalil

## **12. Souvenir (Publications/Daily Newspaper)**

Prof. Dr John Mathew  
Moni Kallenparambil  
Dr Paul Manalil

### **13. Coordination of Local Resource Mobilisation/ Income Development**

Anoop C John  
Binoy P Mathew  
Rev. Dr Shajan A. Idiculla  
Ronnie Varghese Abraham  
Shaji Chudayil

### **14. Health Care and Medical Assistance Service**

Dr Varghese Punnoose  
Dr Mathew Thomas  
Dr Selin Abraham  
Dr Anna Mathew  
Dr Jerry George  
Dr Anu Shinoi  
Dr Anu Ann Alex

### **15. Worship Coordination**

Rev. Fr M P George  
Reuben Philip Abraham  
Rev. John Mathai  
Rev. Siju C Philip  
Rev. Fr Kurian Mathew Vadakkeparambil  
Rev. Viji Varghese Eapen  
Abraham George  
Mrs Jubi Mathew

### **16. Pre-Assembly Events Committee**

Pre-Assembly for Women: Dr Jaisy Karingattil  
Pre-Assembly for Youth: Dr Dn Anish K Joy

### **17. Liaisoning with Theological Seminaries and Colleges**

Prof Dr Joseph Varghese

### **18. Women's Desk**

Dr Jaisy Karingattil  
Anne George  
Jisha Mathew Zachariah



## CCA Executive Committee

### Officers



Dr Mathews George Chunakara  
(General Secretary/ CEO)  
Malankara Mar Thoma Syrian Church



Bishop Reuel Norman Marigza  
(Moderator)  
United Church of Christ in the Philippines



Dr Anna Alisha Mathew Simon  
(Vice Moderator)  
Council of Churches of Malaysia



Rev. Chan Kwok-Keung  
(Treasurer)  
Anglican Church in Hong Kong

## Executive Committee Members



Hannah Manickyam Cassandra Mesa  
Anglican Church in Aotearoa, New Zealand,  
and Polynesia



Rev. John Charles Gilmore  
National Council of Churches in Australia



Rev. Jacklevyn Frits Manuputty  
Communion of Churches in Indonesia



Rev. Dethsacda Aphayamath  
Lao Evangelical Church, Lao DPR



Basanti Biswas  
Methodist Church in India



Rev. David Anirudha Das  
National Council of Churches in Bangladesh

## Executive Committee Members



Rev. David Nigel Perry Brohier  
Church of Ceylon in Sri Lanka



Archbishop Dikran Sebouh Sarkissian  
Armenian Orthodox Church of Iran



Dymeas Sovy  
Kampuchea Christian Council, Cambodia



Rev. Levi Vasconcelos Pinto  
Protestant Church in Timor Leste



Rev. Prof. Dr Pradit Takerngrangsarit  
Church of Christ in Thailand



Nant Ruth Shwe Sin Nyein Aye  
Myanmar Council of Churches

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## Executive Committee Members

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Su-Hong Lim  
Presbyterian Church in Taiwan



Tiurida Hutabarat  
Protestant Christian Batak Church in Indonesia



Dr Youngmi Cho  
Presbyterian Church in Korea



Rev. Zion Chung  
Korean Christian Church in Japan



Bishop Dr Kuriakose Mor Theophilose  
Malankara Jacobite Syrian Orthodox Church in India



