



# CCA NEWS

ASIAN ECUMENICAL YOUTH ASSEMBLY (AEYA-2026) ■ CHIANG MAI, THAILAND ■

## Breaking every yoke requires theological renewal, structural transformation, grassroots praxis, and holistic liberation, stresses Rev. Prof. Eric P. Baldonado

“Breaking every yoke requires theological renewal, structural transformation, grassroots praxis, and holistic liberation” was the message of Filipino theologian Rev. Prof. Eric Baldonado to the participants of the Asian Ecumenical Youth Assembly (AEYA) 2026.

Delivering the fifth thematic address on the final day of AEYA on “Break Every Yoke: Youths Overcome Barriers to Transform Ecumenism,” Rev. Prof. Baldonado told young Asian ecumenists, “You are called to embody Christ’s reconciling mission by dismantling barriers and building bridges across denominations, generations, cultures, and nations”. He urged them to rise as active agents of liberation, justice, and reconciliation, and placed young people at the heart of the church’s mission in Asia.

An ordained pastor of the United Church of Christ in the Philippines (UCCP) and professor at Union Theological Seminary in Cavite, Rev. Prof. Baldonado emphasised that Asian youth are not merely inheritors of ecumenism but its present leaders. “You are not waiting for permission; you are already empowered by the Spirit,” he said, underscoring



that the transformation of church and society depends on their leadership now.

Rev. Prof. Baldonado named the “yokes” weighing heavily on both youth and the ecumenical movement: doctrinal divisions, generational hierarchies, socio-political fragmentation, gender and sexuality exclusion, economic exploitation, digital divides, colonial legacies and cultural imperialism, environmental crisis, religious nationalism and interfaith hostility, as well as apathy and spiritual disconnection. These are not isolated challenges

but interconnected systems of injustice requiring a holistic response, he stressed.

A central focus of the address was the call for youth to embody God’s liberating mission. He contrasted this with the misuse of religion as propaganda, describing it as faith used to control, dominate, or preserve power, while emphasising that authentic mission is rooted in truth, justice, reconciliation, and solidarity.

He urged young people to critically discern their contexts, and said, “When faith is co-opted for political or institutional ends, resist. When faith is lived as mission, truth, justice, reconciliation, embrace it, embody it, proclaim it.”

Rev. Prof. Baldonado concluded with a resounding call: “Rise up, young people of Asia. Take upon yourselves Christ’s liberating yoke. Embody the mission of God. Transform ecumenism into a movement of justice, peace, and creation care, and let your lives proclaim to the world: the yokes are broken, the barriers are overcome, and the kingdom of God is at hand.”



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AEYA 2026 Group Picture



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## Digital ministry must go beyond content creation to shape identity, values and faith formation, say young Asian communicators at AEYA-2026



**D**uring a panel discussion at the Asian Ecumenical Youth Assembly (AEYA), young Asian communicators reflected on the impact of social media on youth. Responding to the question “Does Technology Make Us Less Human? Impact of Social Media on Youth in Asia”, the panellists offered a compelling exploration of social media’s impact on youth in Asia.

Moderated by Carlene Rishiqa Dharminder from the Asia Collaborative Mission Societies, Malaysia, the session featured three young speakers from Myanmar, the Philippines, and Australia, who shared their perspectives.

Sa Samuel from the Church of the Province of Myanmar (Anglican) spoke about the situation in Myanmar, where access to free internet is restricted. In such a context, people must go to great lengths to access social media platforms and even basic search engines, while remaining constantly aware of the risks tied to their digital footprint.

Mr Samuel emphasised that everyone shares responsibility in the digital space, whether as content creators or consumers. He said that social media should not be used solely for worldly engagement, but also as a platform to serve God. Urging participants to shine their “light both offline and online”, he stressed that one’s digital presence should reflect deeper spiritual

values.

Jhoanna Kille Juan Ragasa from the United Methodist Church in the Philippines reflected on the growing role of technology in everyday life, noting that while it has become inseparable from human experience, the deeper question lies in how it is used to live out God’s commandments. Describing social media as more than just a tool, Ms Ragasa said it functions as a “formation system” that shapes identity, values, beliefs and faith. Algorithms influence what people see, feel and consider important, raising the question of whether individuals are shaping these systems or being shaped by them.

“If algorithms shape people, then the Church is called to penetrate the people’s algorithm—not for popularity, but for presence, truth and transformation.” This involves showing up in digital spaces with authenticity, creating content that reflects truth, justice and grace, interrupting cycles of hate and misinformation, and offering narratives that restore human dignity, said Ms Ragasa.

Ms Ragasa further added that we are not just called to go viral; we are called to be faithful. The Church is not called to compete with technology, but to discern and redeem it. She also stressed that digital ministry goes beyond content creation. It is about formation, discipleship and witness, calling on believers to use technology to share stories, proclaim the Good News and affirm

what it means to be truly human.

David Abel Toogood from the Uniting Church of Australia shared personal reflections on his use of social media, highlighting the intentionality he now brings to his digital life.

Mr Toogood invited participants to consider what it means to bring one’s whole self into both online and offline spaces, and to carry the “yoke of Christ” in a digital age.

Addressing the role of technology design, Mr Toogood noted that while current algorithms are often created to hold users’ attention for as long as possible, they can also be shaped by more ethical intentions, where technology works with users to help achieve their goals rather than hinder them. He called on young and ethically minded technology experts and entrepreneurs to continue imagining a different and better digital world.

A facilitator who assists churches in creating leadership pathways for youth and young adults, Mr Toogood urged participants to reflect and examine their engagement with technology. He posed a series of questions, ultimately challenging AEYA participants to consider whether their digital habits align with their values and their relationship with God. He also highlighted the words of Jesus, “For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light,” as a guiding principle for navigating the complexities of the digital world.



“ The AEYA brought together diverse cultures and traditions, creating a space that was both creative and deeply energetic. What stood out most was how this diversity did not divide us, but instead became our strength. There was a powerful sense of shared purpose, where young people from across Asia came together not just to represent their contexts, but to listen, learn, and build something meaningful collectively. It truly reflected the strength and potential of Asian youth, the ‘Asian power’ that emerges when voices unite across differences. ”

**Soo Bok Lee**  
Presbyterian Church of Korea

# CULTURAL NIGHT





# Asian youth urged to confront “intersectional yokes” and reaffirm faith and public witness

**B**lending theology with social critique, Dr Kochurani Abraham, renowned Indian feminist theologian and researcher, challenged AEYA 2026 participants to confront the “intersectional yokes” shaping the realities of today’s youth and urged them to reaffirm faith and public witness.

Delivering the thematic address on “Break Every Yoke: Reclaiming the Prophetic Vision of the Household of God,” Dr Abraham identified patriarchy and the exploitative relationship between humans and the Earth as central forces driving inequality and ecological crisis. She argued that deeply embedded hierarchical and dualistic ways of thinking, such as divisions between mind and body or spirit and matter, have enabled systems of domination across gender, caste, race, class, and even nature itself.

“These frameworks normalise inequality and weaken our sense of interdependence,” she said, linking such structures to pressing issues including youth unemployment, migration, trafficking of women and girls, and the disproportionate impact of climate change on marginalised communities.

Framing these challenges as forms of “intersectional systemic violence,” Dr Abraham proposed three guiding metaphors, freedom, fire, and friendship, as a way forward for Christian discipleship and social engagement.

Dr Abraham described freedom as both resistance and renewal, encompassing not only liberation from structural injustices



such as caste, gender inequality, economic exploitation and political or religious nationalism, but also inner emancipation from fear, silence and complacency. She stated that contemporary injustices operate as “intersectional yokes” that bind both people and the environment, making prophetic action inseparable from social and ecological responsibility.

She posited fire as the inner force that sustains such action. Drawing on biblical imagery from prophets such as Isaiah and Jeremiah, she interpreted fire as the transformative energy of the Spirit, one that purifies, disrupts comfort and generates urgency for change. Without this “baptism of fire”, moral conviction risks remaining abstract rather than becoming lived

commitment, she warned.

Dr Abraham also presented friendship as a social vision. Re-reading the Gospel through a lens of equality, she emphasised Jesus’ shift from hierarchical authority to relational solidarity, where disciples are called friends rather than servants. This challenges entrenched hierarchies and reimagines the “household of God” as an inclusive community grounded in mutual recognition, she argued. The movement from “I” to “We,” expressed in the prayer “Our Father,” thus becomes both a spiritual and political reorientation.

Kean Jaramah Rollon from the International Movement of Catholic Students - Asia Pacific moderated the session.

## Role of youth in promoting ecological justice and community well-being

**Rev. Hasiholan Nababan, Batak Protestant Christian Church (HKBP)**

**T**he Confession of the Faith of HKBP teaches that humans are called to care for God’s creation and to work for justice in society. Article 5 explains that people must protect the environment and avoid harmful actions such as burning forests, cutting trees without control, and polluting water and air. Article 13 states that the government receives its authority from God and must protect citizens, uphold justice, and make sure that development brings benefits for everyone.

Environmental damage often happens, especially in areas where Indigenous communities live. The situation in Tapanuli is one example. A large company like PT. Toba Pulp Lestari (TPL) once provided jobs and social support, including to the church. However, these benefits were not equal to



the serious ecological damage it caused. Natural disasters and long-term trauma became part of the community’s daily life.

In the history of Batak land, Indigenous people lived in harmony with nature and used local resources such as frankincense

(*kemenyan*) for their well-being. But now, frankincense is limited in Batak land. According to the Confession of the Faith, HKBP will support development as long as it does not harm the environment (Article 3) and follows government policies that must promote justice and the well-being of the people. The government’s decision to revoke PT. TPL’s permit was an important step toward ecological justice. Still, the church must continue helping disaster victims and supporting former workers.

Youth have an important role in this mission. They are called to lead community empowerment, support trauma healing, offer training, and speak for justice without falling into apathy. They must not become stuck in a yoke that creates a comfort zone. Young people must speak up bravely. Break Every Yoke!

## “We carry a yoke where the future feels uncertain, yet we still choose hope,” says Haruki Kusakabe

**H**aruki Kusakabe comes from a rapidly aging society where churches face shrinking congregations and an uncertain future. As a delegate of the United Church of Christ in Japan at AEYA 2026, she represents a generation navigating faith amid social isolation, cultural hesitation toward organised religion, and ongoing demographic decline. In a candid conversation, CCA News sat with her to reflect on her lived experiences, personal struggles, and enduring hope for the Church in Japan today.

**Q: What was it like growing up as one of the only Christian youths in your community?**

A: I grew up in a small rural countryside where the only young people were my siblings and me. That experience taught me to adjust myself to different situations. While I was surrounded by supportive adults who guided me and gave me opportunities to take on leadership roles, I often lacked peers I could truly relate to. As a result, my journey of faith sometimes felt lonely. I was also the only Christian in my school, and I didn't have anyone there to connect with, share my faith openly, or pray with.

**Q: How do you experience the generational gap within the Church?**

A: I feel it very strongly. The older generation grew up during a time of economic growth and had a strong sense of hope for the future. In contrast, young people today face declining birth rates and an aging society. Older people do not understand what it feels like to have no peers in the church. They do not understand why we struggle to feel hope or why we feel such stagnation. They simply say, “things were better before”.



For the young people in Japan, the “yoke” we carry is the feeling that our future will not get better. It is a sense of stagnation and limitation. This makes it difficult for older members to fully understand our struggles.

**Q: What challenges did you face in expressing your faith openly?**

A: In Japan, religion is often viewed with suspicion and is sometimes associated with cults. Although there is no violent persecution, there exists a subtle form of “silent persecution,” where faith is treated as a social taboo. From a young age, we learn to *kuuki wo yomu* (“read the air”) and adjust ourselves to social expectations.

At the same time, Japanese society is deeply shaped by religious practices. People visit temples, care for Buddhist graves, and even send their children to Christian schools. Yet, because these practices are woven into daily life, they are rarely recognised as “religion.” As a result, those who openly express personal faith are often perceived as unusual or even cult-like.

When I speak about Christ, my friends tend to distance themselves quietly. Fearing the loss of relationships, I chose to keep my faith private, sharing it only within close and trusted circles.

**Q: What motivated you to pursue theological studies despite these challenges?**

A: I realised that complaining alone will not change anything. If I abandon my calling because of these difficulties, the decline of the Church will only accelerate. I wanted to respond to this reality, even in a small but meaningful way.

**Q: How do you envision the future of the Church in this context?**

A: I believe the Church must become more sustainable by letting go of outdated expectations, adapting to present realities, and working more collaboratively across congregations. Many churches still hold on to the past, when they had more members, greater financial stability, and more active programs, and try to maintain that same level of activity today. This often leads to exhaustion among pastors and members.

In rural Japan, one in four churches has no pastor, and many pastors travel between churches to lead multiple services, which is not sustainable. Instead, churches need to adjust to their current scale, by uniting, sharing resources, supporting one pastor, and even embracing online worship.

We can no longer afford division or internal conflicts. Rather than hoping for population growth, we must rethink what the Church should be today. This requires a new perspective, one that moves beyond individual congregations and fosters connection across churches locally, nationally, and globally.

“It was an amazing experience for me, especially as it was my first time in an international ecumenical setting. Being in such a space allowed me to connect with people from diverse backgrounds, understand different cultures, and truly experience the richness they bring. I was able to engage with new ideas and perspectives, learning not just intellectually but through shared experiences. This helped me to widen my understanding. What made it even more meaningful was meeting people who had come together with a common purpose.”

**Shinaya Kura Peyton Kaiwai**  
Anglican Church in Aotearoa, New Zealand and Polynesia



“For me, this was my first experience in a truly multicultural and diverse ecumenical space. It opened my eyes to the many realities and challenges faced by people across different contexts. Through listening and engaging with others, I was able to better understand these issues and, more importantly, stand in solidarity with those affected.”

**Navodi Fernando**  
International Movement of Catholic Students - Asia Pacific

# “Youth in Dialogue” highlights Asia’s pressing issues, calls for collective action



The second “Youth in Dialogue” sessions, held on 20 April, addressed five urgent issues shaping the future of Asia: economic challenges, peace and security, human rights, migration, and climate crisis and ecological responsibility.

Participants emphasised that these challenges are deeply interconnected, collectively intensifying the struggles of vulnerable communities across the region. Economic instability, rising living costs, unemployment, and wage inequality were identified as key factors driving migration and widening social gaps. At the same time, human rights violations, corruption, weak governance, and systemic injustice, continue to disproportionately affect minorities, women, and refugees.

Grounded in the vision of the “Jesus Manifesto,” the human rights discussion called for liberation, justice, and dignity. Participants were reminded that all people bear the image of God and are called to reflect that image in society. Asian youth stressed that faith must move beyond belief into action, particularly in confronting injustice and inequality.

Discussions on peace and security explored both personal and structural dimensions of conflict. Participants identified discrimination, a lack of forgiveness, and failures in leadership as major barriers to peace, while affirming that true peace can only be achieved through justice, reconciliation, and respect for human

dignity.

Reflecting on the climate crisis and ecological responsibility, participants highlighted the urgent environmental challenges facing Asia. They emphasised that ecological degradation is not only an environmental issue but also a matter of justice. Grounded in the belief that creation is God’s gift, youth called for a faith-based response. Churches were encouraged to play an active role by integrating ecological teachings, supporting grassroots initiatives, and empowering young people to lead climate justice movements.

On migration, youth reflected on the lived realities of displacement, including loneliness, exploitation, unsafe working conditions, and cultural alienation. Churches were challenged to move beyond charity-based responses toward justice-oriented advocacy, fostering inclusion, solidarity, and meaningful engagement with migrants and strangers.

The sessions concluded with a strong and unified call for faith-driven action, urging youth and churches to invest in education, advocacy, and collective initiatives that address systemic issues. Emphasising the need to break the “yokes” that oppress communities, participants affirmed their commitment to building a more just, inclusive, and sustainable Asia, rooted in dignity, faith, and hope.

## A Prayer in Yellow

*Seohyeon Kim, Presbyterian Church in the Republic of Korea (PROK)*



**K**orean participants expressed the realities of Korean society through prayer using five colours during the “AEYA Core” session. Among the colours, yellow carries a meaning we must face more deeply. In Korea, the yellow ribbon is a symbol of remembering the Sewol Ferry Disaster. In

the spring of 2014, many lives—including students on a school trip—were lost in the sea. This year marks the 12th anniversary of the tragedy. The yellow ribbon is not just a sign of mourning for the past. It is a sign of waiting for those who never returned and a promise to keep seeking the truth.

I am a young person who lived in the same time as them, but their time stopped on that day. Why could we not protect them? What still keeps the truth beneath the surface? Youth of God are called not to remain silent before these questions. We choose to remember. It may hurt, but forgetting is a

greater violence.

So, we remember that April, and in April 2026, we prayed together with youth across Asia. We pray that such pain will never happen again and that we may live in a world where life is valued above everything else. This prayer of yellow has not ended. It continues even now, and it must continue.



# AEYA-2026 CLOSES WITH YOUNG ASIAN CHRISTIANS COMMITTING TO "BREAK EVERY YOKE"

