

Editorial

To be Asian is to be multicultural. But are churches in Asia truly engaged in multicultural ministry and solidarity?

This was the question behind the holding of a Southeast Asia sub-regional consultation-workshop on “Empowering the Church for Multicultural Ministry and Solidarity” in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, on 16-20 September 2007. Organized by the Faith, Mission and Unity (FMU) program area of the Christian Conference of Asia, it was partially supported by the International Network on Multicultural Ministries set up by the World Council of Churches and hosted by the Council of Churches of Malaysia.

The church in Asia reflects the ethnic or cultural richness of the region. Many local congregations, even in major cities of Asia, are organized on the basis of ethnic groupings. Some of these are a result of early missionary work. Newer congregations are being set up in the cities as a result of the migration of people. Organized according to ethnic lines, the church somehow provides identity for a people who have been uprooted, have migrated, and feel insecure about their identity. For many of these “uprooted” people, their ethnic church serves as a refuge that provides them a sense of comfort and a home.

Ironically, however, although many of these congregations may be organized according to ethnic lines or groupings, their ways of worship and their concept of the life and witness of the church could still be captive to the culture of the majority through which their congregations came into being—the Western missionary churches. So although the ethnic languages or dialects may be used in the service, Asian congregations could still be singing hymns from the West (only translated into local dialects), or using pictures or sculptures of a White, European faced Jesus in their Christian education materials, and their way of sharing the Word could still be based on individualistic and personalized reading of scriptures. So what is Asian about it?

The church needs to be concerned about multicultural ministry and solidarity. This is not only about ministering to minority ethnic groups, newly arrived migrants or refugees in a given area. Rather, it is about ministering to all people across their ethnic, cultural, denominational, even religious, boundaries. It involves real engagement, mutual respect and mutual learning among members of the congregation and among members of the wider community. It is definitely part of the life and mission of the church as it seeks to live out its calling to be the “salt of the earth” and “light of the world”. It includes a vision of OIKOUMENE as God’s household—where all equally belong, and all partake through just sharing of resources. It is clearly a mark of being ecumenical –affirming that we all live as members of the household of God, interdependent, interconnected.

The theme of the consultation-workshop, “Empowering the Church for Multicultural Ministry and Solidarity,” is to emphasize our contextual need in Asia which is for more solidarity. It is not enough to show tolerance towards people who may differ from us in terms of gender, ethnicity, language, culture, history, denomination, or religion, etc. In our globalized age and context, what we need is not mere co-existence and tolerance of one another—but genuine solidarity, as brothers and sisters, or as children of God, to face the

difficult realities that affect all of us. What is needed is solidarity through joint action in facing our common problems brought about by globalization, neo-colonialism, injustice, corruption in high places, terrorism, environmental degradation, and the like.

This edition of the *CTC Bulletin* features five selected papers from that consultation-workshop. They are the papers of Hermen Shastri (general secretary of the Council of Churches of Malaysia), Philip Thomas (Cor Episcopa of the Syrian Orthodox Church in Malaysia), I. W. J. "Broery" Hendriks (a minister of the Protestant Church in the Moluccas, East Indonesia), Tabita Kartika Christiani (Christian education professor of Duta Wacana Christian University in Yogyakarta, Indonesia) and Lizette Tapia-Raquel (lecturer at Union Theological Seminary in Cavite, Philippines).

Other papers featured in this issue are lectures or presentations given in various programs held by CCA or its members and related institutions during this year. These include a lecture given in Pakistan by Kamalam Joel, a minister of the Methodist Church in Sri Lanka; an input at the Ecumenical Lecture Series in Davao City by Liza B. Lamis, women's program coordinator of the National Council of Churches in the Philippines; a lecture prepared for the gathering of Christian educators by Hope S. Antone, executive secretary of CCA-FMU; a lecture given by James Haire, a theology professor at Charles Sturt University in Canberra, Australia who is on the Executive and General Committees of CCA; and the keynote address of Hope S. Antone at the 50th anniversary of the Association for Theological Education in South East Asia.

May these papers provide some inspiration for you, or at least some food for thought, on your theological journey.

Hope S. Antone
Editor