



Christian Conference of Asia

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PENTECOST MESSAGE

“Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words.” (Roman 8:26)

Dear sisters and brothers in Christ,

This week, participants coming from different churches in the ASEAN member countries (Association of South East Asian Nations), such as, Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Vietnam and Timor Leste, with partner churches and organizations serving in these countries, gathered in Chiang Mai for an ASEAN Mission Conference from 2-6 June 2014. The participants of this Conference reflected on the challenges and opportunities for churches in this region as ASEAN members have decided to launch a new “ASEAN Community” in 2015. Through this Conference, the participants got the opportunity to understand the emerging realities in this region, to reflect on the mission of God in this changing situation and to suggest ways for the churches to move ahead together in promoting life, peace and justice to all.

Like the experience in the first Pentecost, the participants were astonished when they listened to each other sharing their stories, experiences and challenges as they proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ in their respective communities. Their hearts were burning and they realized the importance of knowing each other, sharing concerns and supporting each other in the various ministries they were engaged in.

Many participants are not yet aware about this huge plan of ASEAN 2015. As they reflected on this plan and the ongoing economic, political, religious and socio-cultural trends which have begun to emerge, they raised some serious concerns that can affect the life of the people and the integrity of creation. Some of the problems that had been highlighted include the impact of development, in terms of infrastructure such as highways interlinking some of the countries to facilitate movement of people and goods, and huge buildings to house corporates, on the daily lives of the people, especially the farmers and the rural poor who have to give up ownership of land and their homes for such structures; the longstanding devastating effects on environment, flora and fauna, when forests and all other green cover are stripped to make way for development; rapid urbanization and the increasing gap between the poor and the rich; the lopsided flow of capital; the growing numbers of migrant workers; the changing values and the issues of identity; the impact of Information Technology especially among young people; the increasing conflicts along the line of ethnicity, religion and socio-economic conditions, religious intolerance, human rights violations, the domination of the majority and the challenges of the disintegration of communities.

In the midst of mounting problems and concerns as highlighted in this meeting, often the churches which represent the Christian minority in almost all countries, feel overwhelmed and in a weak position to respond to these enormous problems. Often, in such a time as this, especially in times when we are under pressure, we do not know how to pray and our words are insufficient to deliver our agonies, worries, fears and petitions to God. However, this is the good news of the Pentecost that “... the Spirit helps us in our weakness.... and that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words.”

Let us also pause to remember the conflicts and atrocities that occur almost daily all over the world, where people are on the brink of destroying each other in wars and hostilities due to border disputes, ownership rights and intrusions into the sovereignty of nations, resorting even to raping and kidnapping innocent girls and women as weapons of war. Let us also remember with pain, the increasing number of young people who are psychologically challenged to cope with peer behavior and non-acceptance, to such an extent, that, the suffering in the silence and loneliness of their hearts, manifests itself in indiscriminate violence against fellow beings and themselves.

As we celebrate Pentecost, let us remember that God never leaves us alone, to be helpless and desolate. Jesus promised his disciples that the Advocate, the Holy Spirit will be sent by God to guide us into all the truth. It is our faith that God will continue to use the churches as co-workers in God's mission to proclaim life to all. This requires us to return to God wholeheartedly, confess our sinfulness and renew our commitment to Christ.

Sincerely



Rev. Dr. Henriette Hutabarat Lebang
General Secretary