

Interreligious youth training programme adopts online learning component



YATRA 2014 in Cambodia. Photo: WCC/Naveen Qayyum

06 July 2017

The World Council of Church's (WCC) popular YATRA (Youth in Asia Training for Religious Amity) programme has a new online learning component that adds four weeks of intensive training to two weeks of residential learning. When 35 young men and women from 14 different countries meet at the Jakarta Theological Seminary in Indonesia on 8 July, they will already have a familiarity with the major religious traditions found in Asia, thanks to their online studies.

YATRA is an interreligious course developed by the WCC's programme on Interreligious Dialogue and Cooperation after the Busan Assembly as a contribution to the WCC's pilgrimage of justice and peace. YATRA is aimed at changing capacity of Asian churches by cultivating a new group of ecumenical leaders competent in interreligious engagement across Asia.

Rev. Prince Devanandan, president of the Methodist Church of Aotearoa New Zealand has been sending young leaders from his church to YATRA since the programme's inception. "The youth of New Zealand and the youth from the Pacific islands grow up in a mono religious context," he said. "When they meet people of other faiths, they basically do not know how to relate."

In such a context, Devanandan feels that YATRA has “opened a new gateway into the future of our youth in New Zealand to get to know other religions and beliefs.”

According to Devanandan, the YATRA programme is popular with the youth in his church and has received wide attention. The opportunity for the participants to report to the annual conference of the Methodist Church each year elicits much appreciation and interest, so even more youth are encouraged to participate.

“YATRA informs and transforms our youth,” said Devanandan. “The programme attracts young people, and I very much look forward to this programme continuing for the benefit of many others”.

For Rev. David Das, general secretary of the National Council of Churches in Bangladesh (NCCB), the participation of young people from Bangladesh in the YATRA programme has “proved to be life-transforming at the personal, intellectual and spiritual levels”.

Das attributes the successful impact of YATRA on Christian youth in Bangladesh to the choice of subject areas, learning methodology, and interactive and intercultural experience-based learning.

This year’s YATRA course will be based on the theme “Passionately Christian and Compassionately Interreligious,” a course developed by Prof. Sathianathan Clarke, the Bishop Sundo Kim chair in World Christianity and professor of Theology, Culture and Mission at Wesley Theological Seminary, Washington DC. Dr Clarke is also a member of the Reference Group of the Interreligious Dialogue and Cooperation programme of the WCC.

“The theme will help participants to understand interreligious engagement in today’s world as dialogue of the head, heart and hands involving intellectual curiosity, passionate commitment, and compassionate solidarity,” said Rev. Dr Peniel Rajkumar, WCC programme executive for Inter-religious Dialogue. “We hope that the combination of online and experience-based learning will enable participants to be academically sound and practically grounded, thus fostering a holistic learning environment.”

YATRA 2017 is being organized by the WCC in collaboration with the Jakarta Theological Seminary and with the support of the Communion of Churches in Indonesia.

[More information about YATRA: Youth in Asia Training for Religious Amity](#)