

HOW CHURCHES IN ASIA ARE RESPONDING TO THE COVID19 CRISIS, 7 MAY.

Illuminating the crucial role of CCA, this Webinar allowed us to listen to the current experience of Christian leaders from Iran, through Pakistan, India, Indonesia, the Philippines, Hong Kong to Japan

Whilst the contexts are very different, there are some common themes.

1. In these early stages of response, the shared suffering has led to some closer collaboration; the sharing of resources; an obvious awareness of our common humanity; the rekindled hope that we might build a “civilisation of love”.

An Armenian saying was drawn to our attention: “Whenever people are in difficulty, they come closer and closer to each other”.

2. Nonetheless, the suffering is immense; the impact is most severe on the poor and those already most vulnerable. It is impossible to know when this pandemic will be over.

Meanwhile, we see the lack of developed health systems in many places. And while it is obviously best to follow Health Guidelines, this is problematic when people have no access to face- masks, sanitisers and have had no training in basic hygiene, are told to “stay home” but have no home!

Accordingly, whilst there are official figures for the number of cases and deaths, these probably understate the reality, given the limited reliable testing taking place.

Especially given, as we heard..., many are on the move in search of food and shelter.

Hence, the “pathetic sight” in India and elsewhere of people walking hundreds of kilometres, trying to survive.

And whilst recognition of our common humanity can often bring a generosity of spirit, in places where ignorance and prejudice are ingrained, minorities suffer further.

The urban areas of Pakistan, for example, may have a more developed interreligious co-operation, but in the rural areas where there has been little of this, local authorities ignore the needs of minorities. Discrimination and corruption cause the minorities to suffer further.

When the virus of discrimination has already “...entered our mind”, the fears and anxieties of COVID19 only makes things worse.

Meanwhile, across all Asia, the economic shut - down to try and contain the spread of COVID19, is having a huge impact. As was said about Indonesia but is true everywhere, the loss of work means there is no income and no ability to purchase basic needs.

3. **ROLE OF CHURCHES:**

Consequently, a first response of Churches has been to provide food relief where possible.

The level of need has exposed the difference between Churches with funds set aside for such an emergency and others which are ill- equipped and unprepared.

In the nature of a crisis, at the same time as Churches are responding to the needs of desperate people, they are trying to raise funds and to recruit volunteers.

Giving hope, in Easter faith, has to be practical.

In Indonesia, the Churches have established a National Taskforce to try and better co- ordinate emergency assistance.

They have devised a local food program with the acronym of FAITH- Faith Available at Home.

Looking ahead into what is described as “the new normal”, Church leaders see that these challenges will continue.

Accordingly, our role will be to keep giving hope in practical ways, co-operating with all people of good will in new and evolving partnerships.

The “psychological crisis” is already with us. So, as people ask ‘what will happen to us’ our answer must give prayerful and practical hope.

Leaders were united in saying that this crisis will change the way the Church serves people. “We won’t be the same”, said one leader.

From Japan, came extraordinary examples of new forms of communication.

Said another Church leader, reflecting some disdain for hitherto indulgent and unhelpful patterns of Church, “We should take this as a challenge from God to simplify and cleanse our Church life!”

For this leader our future Asian Church will focus on “Prayer-Work-Service”.

In this context we see the profound relevance of the chosen theme for Asian Church Sunday, May 24: ***“God Heal Us, as we are Vulnerable”***.

United in prayer, the Holy Spirit can guide us into further co- operative work and service together.

I am profoundly grateful to the leadership of CCA for giving us these Webinars at this time. I hope these brief notes help others, as we all seek to respond as best we can, in Easter faith and hope.

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