

On 6-13 April 2018, we attended the Asian Ecumenical Youth Assembly (AEYA), joining over 350 young people from 23 countries across Asia, representing over 100 churches, denominations, and ecumenical councils. This, only the third event of its kind, was organised by the Christian Conference of Asia (CCA) and held in Manado, North Sulawesi, Indonesia.

The program included seminars, small group dialogues and Q&A sessions, exploring topics such as religious fundamentalism, gender equality, dignity for the disabled, refugees, educational systems, and human sexuality. Hearing people's stories was sometimes heartbreaking, but we were constantly challenged to pursue God's Light and Truth in the darkness of our world.

Attitudes and behaviours that lead to discrimination were frequently addressed. It was discussed how our churches and communities need to remove stigma associated with race, gender, sexuality and ability, so that we can love people like Jesus. There are many things we can be doing to apologise to those we have wronged, to be far more welcoming, and to break physical and attitudinal barriers that prevent anyone from joining the body of Christ.

As a chaplain in a high school, Andrew was interested to hear young people describe the way consumerism is impacting our educational systems. It was said that schools are more focused on enrolments, wealth and prestige, than the outcome of education for students' lives or the development of society. We were called to pursue an educational system that is responsive to the needs of people and communities, one that shapes a generation of global citizens.

During a special panel, featuring prominent leaders of various religions, it became clear how essential interfaith dialogue is in promoting compassion and peace in our countries. While Australia still has some work to do in this area, we can also be engaging with those in other countries who are being shockingly oppressed due to their religious beliefs, such as in Pakistan, Sri Lanka, India, Indonesia, Laos and Philippines. We can be supporting our brothers and sisters through prayer, encouragement, and training, so that they are empowered to pursue interfaith harmony.

The ecumenical nature of the conference led to beautiful experiences of harmony and unity, including daily times of worship - sharing together in song, liturgy, sermons and Bible studies. This culminated at the Asian Easter Celebration, where AEYA participants joined Indonesians from over 1,000 congregations and denominations. Experiencing so many cultures coming together in worship was awe inspiring, like glimpsing the true Kingdom of God.

A personal highlight for Andrew was building a close relationship with his host family, who provided selfless hospitality. He was also welcomed by their friends, relatives and church community. It didn't take long for him to understand how accurate the motto of Manado is: *Torang Samua Basudara*, "We are all one family". Similarly, the friendship shown between the AEYA participants whom Erin stayed with, is a special memory for her. She recalls the way they loved one another, served one another, were faithful to one another and considerate of one another. Both Andrew and Erin felt that the fellowship within the conference, was a true embodiment of the humble and self-giving nature of God as revealed in Jesus.

We are incredibly thankful for the opportunity to attend AEYA. It is exciting to now share what we have gained with our communities, and we encourage others to engage in ecumenical dialogue and projects, to help bring God's Light and Truth to our world.

- Andrew Traeger and Erin Kerber