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Baptist News

A quarterly news letter of the Council of Baptist Churches in North East India (CBCNEI)

The Council comprises Assam Baptist Convention, Nagaland Baptist Church Council, Manipur Baptist Convention, Garo Baptist Convention, Arunachal Baptist Church Council and Karbi Anglong Baptist Convention.

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Circulation:

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Babul Boro
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Subscription:

One Year	₹ 150 (US \$20)
Two Years	₹ 250 (US \$35)
Three Years	₹ 400 (US \$50)
Five Years	₹ 600 (US \$80)

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Editorial. . .



Greetings to all our readers in the name of Christ, our Lord!

Let me start with a note on the current issue on ‘*corona virus*’ which is a household talk in every nook and corner of the globe. It is not simply a talk but a scary and painful reality we are facing today. The impact of the virus has taken many lives all over the world. It has displaced our normal systems and activities, touching the political, social, cultural and religious fabrics.

In this situation, we try to look at the issue with several speculations:

To some, “Is it simply one of the diseases or a punishment from God because of our sins”? To some, apply good reasoning and authenticate with facts and figures. To some, this is one of the signs of the second coming of Christ. To some, this is the end of the world. When the society tries to impart the so-called right to information for the benefit of us all, some of us ask “To obey God or Caesar”? To some, this is human negligence intentionally or unintentionally. To some, propagate the old saying “Prevention is better than cure” as a real repellent and remedy.

The virus has impacted human lives all over the world. It has no boundary, race, colours, status, age and it spreads like wild fire. It has touched the total being of a person: physically,

emotionally, spiritually, relationally, socially and politically. This is an alarming and threatening scenario and we cannot ignore it now.

The challenge before the church is to discern the time as this and act wisely. As the church, let us keep each other in prayer to God for His love and protection. At the same time keep ourselves vigilant in terms of being open to the informal education imparted through media, medical experts, churches, NGOs and government and put them into practice the essential do's and don'ts. Someone said, "Corona virus had big ego. *It will not come to your house, unless you go out and invite.*" *Be on our guard!*

In this issue, we have included a section on "*Remembering and Acknowledging our past Leaders*" in order to keep in touch with them and also be encouraged through their testimonies and words of encouragement. The rest are few articles, reports and activities undertaken within these few months. Thanks to all our contributors. God bless all our readers. Wherever you are, please do keep each other in prayer especially in times like this. Stay safe!

Yours in Christ



Rev Prof Akheto Sema

*“Remembering and
Acknowledging
our past Leaders”*



*Rev. Dr. A. K. Lama
Former General Secretary of CBCNEI (2008-2014)*

Dear CBCNEI family,

Greetings in the name of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

My thanks and gratitude to Rev. Dr. Akheto Sumi who has taken this initiative of reconnecting the former CBCNEI leaders with the Baptist News readers. It has been almost 69 months since I wrote the last editorial as the General Secretary/Editor the Baptist News. I am delighted to be reconnected.

I am currently engaged broadly in Northern India supervising a committed team of 60 associates. The Lord has helped us to reach out few unreached areas through radio, social, and printed media ministry. We have been able to train thousands of young pastors and leaders. This has not been possible without the support of my dedicated wife Dr. Asangla Ao and the mission minded friends who have put their trust on me. I am just delighted to see few new churches started and old churches reinvigorated. The Spirit of God is at move and we are privileged to step in with Him. What excites me more is to see Baptist churches taking the lead in such an endeavor in the unreached

places. We must continue the legacy of being pioneer in reaching the unreached. I fully affirm the General Secretary of Baptist World Alliance, Rev. Elijah Brown, who often exhort, “Every Baptist a missionary.”

I am also glad to inform you that the Baptist World Alliance has invited me to Chair the BWA Commission on Transformational Leaders for 2020 - 2025. I am thankful to Rev. Elijah Brown the General Secretary BWA and the Rev. Vesekhoyi Tetseo, the General Secretary of APBF, who have put their trust on me. Having served BWA for the last two quinquennium in BWA Commission on Theological Education and Ministry, this is another big honorary responsibility. I shall appreciate your prayers for me, my wife, and my fellow associates.

May the good Lord bless you all in your service to the Lord.



“Life can be much broader once you discover one simple fact: Everything around you that you call life was made up by people that were no smarter than you and you can change it, you can influence it, you can build your own things that other people can use. Once you learn that, you’ll never be the same again”.

- Steve Jobs



Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace – A Reflection

Rev Dr Solomon Rongpi, former General Secretary of CBCNEI and currently the Senior Pastor of Diphu Baptist Church, Diphu

I am so thankful to God for the privilege and opportunity given to me to become one of the members of the Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace Reference Group (PJPRG) of the World Council of Churches (WCC). The Central Committee at the 10th Assembly of the WCC held at Busan, South Korea in 2013 has formed this group. Even before the Council of Baptist Churches in North East India (CBCNEI), was taken to full membership (which happened in 2016), I have been inducted as a member of the Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace Reference Group (PJPRG) representing India and Asia. The main purpose and responsibility of this group is to research the problems and issues of different regions of the world by visiting the wounded peoples and that the group will recommend or advise the General Secretary of the World Council of Churches for considering plan of actions during the Central Committee meetings and finally present the recommendations at the 11th Assembly which will be held at Karlsruhe, Germany in 2021, to address all the issues that the world is facing today. The message of the 10th Assembly of the WCC is mentioned here below for your kind knowledge and understanding.

“We intend to move together.

Challenged by our experiences in Busan,

we challenge all people of good will

to engage their God-given gifts in transforming actions.

This Assembly calls you to join us in pilgrimage.

May the churches be communities of healing and compassion,

and may we see the Good News

so that justice will grow and God’s deep peace rest on the world.”

– Message of the 10th Assembly of the World Council of Churches¹

Since 2014, study and reflection have been done on what it means to be on a pilgrimage of justice and peace for the churches today. The Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace-Reference Group (PJPRG) and the Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace-Theological Study Group (PJP-TSG) have organized our work as a pilgrimage, by forming Pilgrim Team Visits around the world. During the annual meetings, we have listened to voices, shared experiences and wisdom, and celebrated spiritual moments with local communities, who experience injustice and violence in many different forms; 2016 in Israel/Palestine, 2017 in Nigeria (and other places in Africa), 2018 in Colombia, 2019 in Thailand (and other places in Asia), and 2020 Fiji (and other places in the Pacific). During this Pilgrimage, four crucial themes have emerged, which were raised in different ways by the diverse hosting communities, yet pointing to a common agenda for the ecumenical Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace:

- Truth and Trauma
- Land and Displacement
- Gender Justice
- Racial Justice.

¹ *Message of the WCC 10th Assembly, 2013, <https://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/assembly/2013-busan/adopted-documents-statements/message-of-the-wcc-10th-assembly>*

In each “station” of the Pilgrimage, we revisited the themes and reflected on them theologically – in light of an emerging ‘*ecumenical theology of companionship*’. Economic greed, and the related human-made climate change, are root causes of forced migration and displacement, along with struggles for land and natural resources. Very often, the violence experienced results in long-term trauma. In the search for human dignity and a life of peace with justice, individuals and communities in all parts of the world fight for gender justice and racial justice. – In this regard, the four identified themes are concrete expressions and illustrations of the foci proposed by the WCC Central Committee at the beginning of our common journey: “As a seven-year programme emphasis, the pilgrimage of justice and peace will combine community-based initiatives and national and international advocacy for Just Peace, focusing on life-affirming economies, climate change, nonviolent peace-building and reconciliation, human dignity...”²

The most recent Pilgrim Team Visits and Reference Groups meeting was held in Fiji Islands at Suva and I would want to concentrate more of this visit in this reflection. There were four teams with different themes. My team was composed of myself as the Team Leader, representing the Baptist Church, Rev. Dr. Kim Jin Yang, United Methodist Church, South Korea, representative from the WCC Staff, Rev. Dr. Robra Martin, a German Pastor, representative from the WCC Staff, and Mrs. Margarita Nelyubova, representing the Orthodox Church of Russia, Mr. Andres Pacheco Lozano, representing Mennonite Church in Columbia. My team concentrated on the theme, “Land and Displacement”.

Meetings with the People:

Our PTV was accompanied by Mr. Netani Rika and Mrs. Julie Chang from the Pacific Council of Churches (PCC) and Mr. Kositatino Tikomaibolatagane from the Caritas Fiji of the Catholic Archdiocese of

² *An Invitation to the Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace, WCC Central Committee 2014*, <https://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/central-committee/geneva-2014/an-invitation-to-the-pilgrimage-of-justice-and-peace>

Suva. Our team focused on land, displacement, and indigenous rights in Fiji. The visit program included two different fishing communities (*Votua* and *Natalaeira*) and a meeting with the leaders of an indigenous/farmer community (*Namosi*), all which are accompanied by Caritas Fiji and the Pacific Council of Churches. The visit of the two fishing communities was marked by a warm welcoming, symbolized by the celebration of the *Sevusevu* (traditional protocol for being accepted as visitors of the community). After the *sevusevu* and an introduction from the PTV members, the dialogue with the groups began while sharing the traditional *kava* (root-based drink that is socially shared by the communities in their social-halls, creating the space for the sharing of stories). A group of around 20-30 people participated in these meetings; in both cases there were more men than women, but it was particularly in *Votua* where the voices of women were heard and fundamental in the sharing of the experiences and hopes of the community.

Although a third visit to the village of *Namosi* had been scheduled, the heavy rains of the previous day and the uncertainty about the severity of the cyclone that had arrived at Fiji led to the decision of cancelling this visit. Instead, a group of leaders of the community (who reside in Suva and who are part of the *Tikina Namosi Landowners Committee* -TNLC) was invited to share their experiences in a dialogue with us at Pacific Theological College (PTC). This delegation was composed by 4 men, among which were some of the founding members of the TNLC.

Brief Description of the Situation in Fiji

The three communities we met are among many other that have witnessed the environmental damage and have been directly affected by the extractive/mining projects in Fiji. In *Votua*, a “new” black-sand mining project (the lease was approved back in 2012 but the extraction began only in August 2019) has become the main concern. The extraction of black sand consists in digging up the seabed with powerful machinery in order to obtain rich minerals (iron/magnesium in particular). A separation is made between the minerals and the sand on the extraction side; the residual sand is returned to the ocean, but now containing

chemicals that have been used for the separation process. This has caused an important damage to the ecosystem, altering the ties, increasing the chances of flooding and diminishing the numbers of fishes, crabs and turtles. This project is run by the Australian-based company “Amex Resources” in partnership with Chinese investors.

Natalaeira has been particularly affected by the gravel extraction project taking place in the Dawasamu river (about 3 kilometres up-mountain from the location of the community), which is performed by Gold Rock Investment Limited (Chinese company). This gravel extraction produces lots of silt (mod) that ends covering the seabed (most specifically the corals) thereby destroying the habitat of different sea animals, fundamental for both the ecosystem but also for the food security of the community.

Namosi is an indigenous/farmer community that has been affected for 52 years of exploration/exploitation of the land for the extraction of different minerals (copper, gravel, gold, among others). Differently from the other groups, an important part of this community is located in the mountains of *Viti Levu*. Some of the environmental implications of the mining project include the contamination of rivers and streams (poisoned residue resulting from mining activities has been deposit in water-sources in the mountains), loss of ancestral trees, and loss of flora and fauna both in the jungle and the rivers.

All the extractive projects identified have been licensed by the Fijian government, regardless of the communities’ repetitive complains and petitions and in direct contradiction with the discourse sustained by the government to the international community in terms of their efforts in fighting climate change. Although studies of potential environmental impacts and consultations with local communities are mandatory for the approval of extractive projects (i.e. leasing of the land/sea), these conversations (when carried out) have been superficial, have misguided/misinformed the community, and have included a series of unfulfilled agreements. Some of the promises that have been made but partially or not fulfilled include economic compensation, employment, plans of

rehabilitation of the affected ecosystems and improvement of the infrastructure and overall livelihood of the communities.

Form of injustice, violence, or oppression and how to address them:

The most fundamental injustice that became evident from the dialogue with the communities is the increasingly irreversible destruction of the ecosystem caused by the extractive projects. The more that these activities are carried out (whether it is a few months, like in the case of *Votua* and *Natalaeira*, or years, like in *Namosi*), the more difficult it will be for natural mechanisms of rehabilitation/cleaning of the land and sea (such as the arrival of cyclones) and for human tools (such as machines that help cleaning the seabed) to mitigate/repair the damage that has already been done.

These impact on the environment have subsequently altered the livelihood of people. For fishing communities such as *Votua* and *Natalaeira*, who for generations have lived in close relation/dependence with the river and the sea and who have learned how to live from the sea-products (especially fish and crab), this has meant that their food-security and basic means of income (men in the communities live from fishing on the river and the sea, while women are able to sustain themselves and their households by fishing close to the seashore) have been compromised. This has forced them to either look for alternative means of income or to move up-river or more deeply into the sea (thus generating additional costs in terms of transportation as well as increasing the risks for the lives of people) in order to be able to survive. Other means of income for the communities have been also affected. For instance, the community of *Natalaeira* has seen a diminishing of visits of tourists, which used to provide additional income to the community. Tourists visited the village for being close to the famous area in the sea named “Moon Reef”, where it used to be possible to watch thousands of dolphins during the day and natural birthing place. The gravel extraction has affected this natural zone, and thereby the presence of dolphins (along with other animals) in that area. This has resulted in the diminishing of visit of tourists, and therefore has further compromised

the subsistence of the community.

The livelihood of these communities has also been affected by the way in which the notion of ownership of the water/land has been altered. These fishing and indigenous communities have passed from being able to move freely and live in just-relations with the environment as a whole to having their movement limited by the privatization (leasing) of land and sea. An expression of this injustice was experienced in *Votua*, as the PTV delegation traveling in a boat with members of the local community were intercepted (while visiting the area of extraction at the sea) by a larger boat with security of the company. The security personnel argued that our presence (but more importantly, the presence of the fisherman) in that particular sea-area is prohibited since it is a “private property”.

The disruption of the relation between ancestral/indigenous communities with the land/water has been aggravated by the existence of legal frameworks (both at a constitutional and judicial level) that favoured the exploitation of minerals in detriment of people’s rights. The leaders of *Namosi* explained how the Fijian legislation is rooted in the mining act that dates back to the colonial times (which has received only minor amendments in the following years) and does not fully recognize the indigenous communities’ rights and their ownership of the land. The constitution of 2013 give “customary rights” but not “ownership rights” to these communities, which implies, among other things, that the government has control and can lease the soil beyond 6 feet underground, disrupting and violating the indigenous understanding that sees the land/water sources as a whole, as an indivisible unity.

The three communities have sought to resist the consequences of these extractive practices through documenting the environmental and social impacts and seeking to advocate to the Fijian government. Here the support and accompaniment of organizations such as Caritas Fiji and PCC has been key. More than seeking for economic compensation for the damage done (although this could in many cases provide an important immediate assistance to the basic needs of the community), these

communities advocate for the ceasing of the exploitative practices in order to protect the different ecosystems. A good example and inspiration in terms of resistance is the TNLC. Different strategies are carried by this local organization in order to promote the unity of the community, document the actions of the mining companies in the region, monitor and prevent the practices of the community itself which can endanger the environment, and creating spaces for political advocacy (TNLC has been able to influence even articles of the constitution of 2013 and has met with the Prime Minister on a couple of occasions). The government systematically downplays the complex relationships within the ecosystems, but follows purposely a strategy in the defence of the companies and their practices.

The three dimensions- celebrating the gifts, visiting the wounds, and transforming the injustices:

In the meetings with the communities of Votua, Nataalaera and Namosi, it was to identify the three dimensions. In regard to the *via positiva*, the first element that became evident was the interconnectedness between these communities with nature, particularly with water, which becomes a constitutive element of their identity. A good example of this profound connection is contained in the motto of TNLC (*Namosi*) “*the land of our hearts, the lands of our soul*”. This bond has been translated into indigenous wisdom in terms of how to interpret/read the signs of nature. For instance, the community of *Nataleira* is able to predict/estimate the severity of the cyclones based on the kind of fishes that arrive (or do not arrive) to the seashore in certain times of the year. This gift of the interconnection with the land/water (relation that can be identified by the gift of interconnectedness and God’s goal of just-relationships between humans and the rest of creation) and the wisdom that emerges from it has given the community the possibility to trace very closely any changes in nature and to be conscious about them.

A second element of the *via positiva* identified was the communal understanding of life, marked by the communities’ sharing, solidarity and hospitality, which was expressed/extended to us as visitors. This

communal life was symbolized in the sharing of *kava* but also in the way in which people spoke not only about themselves but also about the life in the community, their ancestors and the next generations.

And third, it was possible to recognize in the community of *Votua*, particularly in the women, a strong sense of identity and acknowledgment of their gifts: “*I’m gifted with fishing*”, one woman said. This rootedness in their gifts give women the possibility to have their voices heard and “navigate” in a patriarchal society. Furthermore, it is this gift of fishing what gives women the possibility of being relatively economically independent and being able to care for their households.

In terms of the *via negativa* three particular aspects became evident. The first wound detected on the communities was the destruction of ecosystems which subsequently threatens/alters the bond between people and land/water. The very identity and livelihood of these communities is compromised as the extractive projects force them to look for alternative means of subsistence. An example of this was given by a woman in *Votua*, who said in our conversation: “*I’ve been getting crab for 30 years. Now when I go to the island [a small island close to the black sand extraction site] there are no more. I need to find other means of income. I now have to go to town and make juice to sell*”. The relation of the fishing communities with the river-sea, economic stability, rhythm of life, social dynamics, and overall survival of people have been already affected.

A second wound caused by the action of the extractive companies (and their relations with the government) has been the division of the communities, between leaders and people who favour the mining-activity (having in mind promises of economic benefits) and those others who resist its continuation. This division of community allows the continuation of these projects, and therefore has become a strategy they seem to implement systematically.

And third, there was a sense of “being left alone” detected in the different groups. For instance, the communities of *Votua* and *Nataleira* expressed their fear that with such a rapid deterioration of the conditions

(within only a few months and couple of years of the beginning of the extraction, respectively), the concerns about survival will not be only for the generations to come, but also for the upcoming months/years. This sense of “being left alone” is reinforced by the minimal response from the government (which favours the interests of the mining companies) and the lack of concrete measures to stop and reverse the damage have created a situation where people “*just go with the flow*”, without having expectations of things changing soon. For example, the community of *Natalaeira* shared how regardless of their efforts to make petitions to the government, there was no response from their side. Furthermore, members of this group commented that even if the company would be taken to court for their destructive action, it would not necessarily secure the cease of gravel extraction. There have been other cases in which courts have order companies to stop the exploration/exploitation. However, after a day or two of ceasing the activities, these companies have re-engaged with their normal activities, thus ignoring the court orders. This shows that there’s no accountability for the actions of the companies.

Finally, experiences that seek to transform the injustices (*via transformativa*) were identified in the three communities. *First*, it was possible to recognize efforts to work on the unity of the community: while communal life is part of *celebrating the gifts*, the disruption and brokenness of relationships brought by extractive project has also made clear the need not only to celebrate this gift but also to work in maintaining and restoring the unity of the community. A good example in this regard is the efforts carried by a women’s group in *Votua*, which functions regardless of the differences between clans and positions of male leadership. The fact that women are able to meet and dialogue while men cannot is an expression, on the one hand, of empowerment and a clear vision of what is needed in order to transform the realities of brokenness of relationships and, on the other hand, a sign of hope for the whole community.

Second, the ancestral/indigenous wisdom of the communities enables them to assess and document the environmental and social impact of

extractive projects, which serves as foundation for their advocacy actions. A good example of this organization of the community in order to document and advocate is the TNLC (*Tikina Namosi Landowners Committee*), which was formed in 2009 (officially recognized in 2012) as a sign of how the people resist the environmental/social injustices of mining while seeking to transform those very realities. The multiple stages and levels of action planned by the TNLC (which include monitoring the impacts on the environment, working on the unity of the community, and advocating to the national government) is a sign of hope that dialogue, diplomacy and negotiation are means that can bring transformation to the current situation. While not all the requests of the community have been met by the government, their relentless determination and their nurturing of a representative leadership (all major sectors of the community support the action of TNLC) has helped them uniting more as community as well as having the possibility to have their voices heard. This resistance is rooted in their faith in God: that God gives the energy and strength to resist and endure in this particular struggle of the community. Even though the Catholic church (the majority of the *Namosi* community identifies themselves as Catholic) had initially dismissed the claims, her role has changed in recent times, thanks to the new archbishop of Suva and his explicit commitment to fight for environmental justice, and has been further inspired by the willingness and disposition of Pope Francis and the Vatican to engage with the topic of climate change.

And third, the communities have found crucial support in Caritas Fiji and PCC. This support has been expressed in documenting the cases (different documentaries describing the situation of the communities are available in Youtube, as well as other written articles/material³) as well as in accompaniment of these three communities.

³ See “Heartless Mining “(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BDQFAIY3FeQ>) and “Mother Land “(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gm-VqXZYmyI>)

Overall Message:

While fishing and indigenous farmer communities in Fiji such as *Votua*, *Natalaeira*, and *Namosi* witness to the possibility of living in justice and peace with nature (with the land and sea), extractive projects (financed by investors of countries which have banned or limited these extractive practices in their own territory such as by Australia and China) have brought disruption and brokenness to both the environment and to these very communities. The damages created by the extractive activities has included the alteration of the ecosystems characterized by the diminishing and/or eradication of flora, fauna and sea-life (fishes, crabs, turtles), the contamination of water-sources and the ocean, and the overall alteration of natural cycles. All these impacts have subsequently compromised the livelihood of the fishing communities for which the means of income and their very survival depend on what they can receive/get from the river and sea. The presence of the mining-project has divided the communities, which has created the need for working on unity and restoration of relationships. The women's role in meeting as a group regardless of the differences in *Votua*, the experience of TNLC in *Namosi* and the role of the churches supporting the communities are signs of hope in the midst of these injustices. Caritas Fiji and the Pacific Council of Churches are working in documenting the environmental and social consequences of the extractive practices with the goal of advocating on a national/international level. The Fijian government might be especially receptive to the voices from international community. Advocacy can be made by pointing out to the inconsistencies between the governmental discourse (directed towards the international community) of environmental protection as a measure against climate change and their leasing of sea for mining purposes which have clear environmental and social consequences. Here the role of the international community (WCC and its member churches) is crucial in order to support these advocacy initiatives.

Our focus during our PTV was on land and displacement. Different reflections emerged from the dialogues with the communities in Fiji. *First*, the bond between the fishing communities and nature becomes

an invitation to widen the notion of interconnectedness with creation, in terms of not only recognizing the connection between “people with the soil” but also “the people and the water (river/sea)”. Any understanding of the land and displacement that does not include the river/sea is therefore incomplete or partial at its best. Furthermore, this connection between water/land and people is the foundation for the identity of many communities, which implies that any affection or disruption of this interconnection will have an impact on the construction of their identity.

Second, the wisdom of the indigenous communities has invited us to see, appreciate and learn to honour how nature has her own ways of healing: in the land and sea cyclones can be both a source of concern (in terms of the potential destruction it could bring to houses and infrastructure, as well as in the risk they can pose for human lives) but *also* a process of “cleaning” of the land/water, an opportunity for a “new beginning”. The mining project, therefore, not only affect the immediate ecosystems in which they are carried but also damage the natural rhythms and the self-healing capacity of nature.

Third, the dialogues with the communities raised questions about the way in which displacement is conceptualized. While none of the three communities we met has been formally displaced, the deterioration of their livelihood brought by the extractive projects can lead to displacement. Small signs of a potential displacement are seen already, inasmuch as the community need to travel longer distances to find the fishes and crabs that were more accessible in former times (the community was formed around these sources) or by the need to find alternative sources of income in other villages or cities. One of the members of the community of *Votua* reported how they, as fishing community, need “*to follow the fish*” wherever they go. This posts question about whether displacement is to be understood exclusively in terms of re-location of people/communities, or if these apparently “small” changes or adjustments in the patterns of the community could already be seen as forms of forced displacement. In similar lines, it was interesting to note that all the leaders from TNLC reside in Suva (not in *Namosi*), since they have been offered public positions. Can this reality (of having

leaders of the community leaving in the city) be interpreted as a sign of displacement?

And *fourth*, that the extracting activities compromise the independence that the “gift of fishing” has given to women (economically and socially) stress the need to consider an intersectional approach in order to consider these four themes. Here, gender justice and land and displacement aligned, in terms of recognizing that the extractive activities have a particularly strong impact on the lives of women. In addition to seeking to offer support to the communities in general, walking in solidarity with women means to look at these concrete realities with special attention and consideration.

Recommendations to the Central Committee of the World Council of Churches:

- 1) Recommend to the RGPJP of the WCC to follow-up on Caritas and the Pacific Council of Churches on the documentation of the experiences of these three affected communities, and support actions of political advocacy to the Fijian government in this regard as advised/recommended by them. This could be a way to express solidarity with the communities of *Votua*, *Natalaeira* and *Namosi* and way to respond to their plea for concrete and promptly actions.
- 2) Facilitate and promote a dialogue with the Central Committee (CC) of the WCC members of the Pacific and the representative of the Pacific presenting on the next Central Committee meeting in March 2020, in order to bring forth the stories and needs of these communities in Fiji regarding land, displacement and indigenous rights.
- 3) Inspired and challenged by the visits to the communities in Fiji, it has become clear the need to consider their experiences as the WCC is preparing to assess, revise and plan for the upcoming years regarding its strategy on the protection of the environment. So far, an important part of the effort of WCC

has been concentrated on the work with articulating with the UN mechanisms, but this often means that the accompaniment of grass-root levels and communities has been weak. A methodology/strategy requires a complementarity between a human-rights approach as well as on the need of walking/accompanying the churches and communities on a local level. This needs to influence the methodology and programming of the WCC in the upcoming years.



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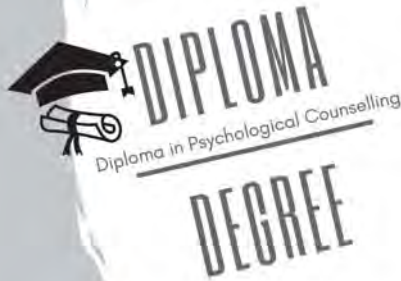
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“The Church’s Response to Climate Change in Northeast India”

**(For to live life in all its
fullness)**

Mr. Phungreiso Varu, CASA NEI, Guwahati.

Issues:

Northeast India (NEI) is a home to about 45 million people (approx) comprises the eight states of Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Tripura and Sikkim. The NEI is highly prone to the consequences to climate change because of its geo-ecological fragility, strategic location vis-à-vis the eastern Himalayan landscape and international borders, its trans-boundary river basins and its inherent socio-economic instabilities. Environmental security and sustainability of the region are greatly challenged by these impacts. Initial scientific research and field observations confirm that the region is suffering from the impacts of climate change already. Due to its unique location and topography it has distinct precipitation and drainage patterns. From March to May, thunderstorms contribute about 20% of annual rainfall. From June to September, monsoon rains supply another



70%. The monsoon season is marked by frequent floods, landslides, soil erosion as melting Himalayan snow and torrential rains feed the majestic Brahmaputra River.

Climate change has dramatic impacts on natural resources, economic activities, food security, health and physical infrastructure in the northeast region of India. The churches in Northeast India faces new challenges; the impact of climate change claims the lives of many congregations' families and churches response to climate change was limited while churches were considered as key actors for socio-economic development, political, health and environment in the region. The threat is especially great wherever congregations' and marginalized people's livelihoods are particularly dependent on natural resources (land, water and community forests with high biodiversity). In these vulnerable areas, climate adaptation measures are of central importance for the protection of rural livelihoods and for ensuring sustainable development.

However, over the last decades, the churches have played significant role-articulating its vision and drawing linkages with spiritual principles and modern challenges that illuminate human responsibilities and highlight what priorities are needed for tackling climate change. Churches have created space for dialogue in partnership with government's leadership, civil society organizations and other stakeholders in NE India and CASA has been instrumental into taking stronger stands and measures that are more ambitious collectively on issue of climate change. This article explores the promising practices; "Churches' response to climate change in NE India" and advocate for strengthening collaborative partnership and churches engagement for sustainable and long-lasting results.

Project Activities:

CASA have been addressing climate change since 2010 in the northeast region (Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram and Nagaland), linking climate change to environment, economic justice and peace issues and NEI church leader's consultation on climate change was organized as fountainhead. The project activities range from policy advice at the regional and state level, to direct local church support and the creation

of partnerships and networks in the region and beyond. Additionally, the project applies a range of human, institutional and local capacity development measures.

As a result of constructive recommendations and continuous support from CASA, “Regional Cooperation for People’s Empowerment (RECOPE)” came into existence for the Northeast. CASA and RECOPE in collaboration continued to extend strategic direction to NEI Church Leaders and facilitated the processes ensuring consistent commitment to tackle climate change in their respective states and local churches. Over the years, various church council/associations in NEI accomplishes series of consultation, convention on climate change with churchg leaders; inter-churches coordination for climate change activities, developed policy and programmes on climate change and environment, local churches awareness programs, communication resources, educational support system for Sunday school teachers and students on climate change, green Sunday observed by churches every year including financial and materials support to local churches from time to time.

Best practices:

Inspired by the Biblical truth and understanding that the obligation lies with human in protecting the Creation of God (Universe) and to act as instruments in facilitating life with dignity and live life in all its fullness; Manipur Baptist Convention (MBC) and Nagaland Baptist Church Council (NBCC) resolved to adopt a climate change and environment policy aiming to sustain holistic and prophetic ministry of the church aligning with their convention and council vision and mission of faith in action.

Sl.No.	Convention/Council	Associations	Churches	Members
1	Manipur Baptist Convention	29	1,4702	2,0190
2	Nagaland Baptist Churches Council	24	1,634	62,8192
	Total	53	3,906	84,8382

Source: CBCNEI, 2020

Some of the policy efforts that are worth considered as best practices:

- A committee called “**Social and Environmental Service (SES)**” consisting of seven members with at-least three women set up in all the Associations and Churches which looked after the social and environmental issues at the local level.
- SES attended and organized regular conferences, workshops/ seminars, trainings on environment and climate change and equipped Associations and Church members.



- **Green Sunday:** All the churches observed 1st Sunday of June every year as “Green Sunday” in honor of God’s creation and for the enhancement of protection of natures and environment with various meaningful activities.
- **Awareness & Tree Plantation Season:** The season beginning from March till June of every year is declared as “Awareness Building and Tree Plantation Season” in order to enhance awareness on environment by encouraging people’s participation as responsible stewards in



caring the natures.

- **Incorporation of environmental lessons in Sunday school:** All Associations churches have incorporated/integrated some lessons on environment, ecology and climate change in the Sunday school curriculum for all classes.



- **Hunting of wild animals and birds:** Measures have taken and controlled hunting of wild animals and birds to bring harmony with nature. Members of Churches are prohibited hunting during mating seasons.



- **Fishing:** Fishing by means of Explosives, Dynamo and Chemicals such as Indrine, Insecticide etc., has been declared as offence; because they not only harm the bio-ecosystem but also indicate lack of morality by annihilating living beings that are not necessarily fish and also



harmful for consumption. Fishing during breeding seasons is totally prohibited in many member churches.

- **Climate Change related actions:** The Association and Churches committed to cutting carbon footprint, helping mitigate climate change and educating its congregation adapt the impact of climate change. Forest fire and jhum cultivation is drastically reduced and regeneration of forest is in progress by way of protection and plantation.



- **Community Reserved Forest:** The Associations and Churches have appealed every village and town to have “Reserved Forest” and encouraged to plant and preserve indigenous flora and fauna. Moreover, wanton burning of forest/wild fire and cutting of trees from the reserved forests has been declared as an offence.
- o **Waste Management:** The Churches have declared littering and dumping of waste in rivers, streams and open spaces as unethical, discouraged use of biodegradable items in any functions such as plastics & plastic bottles and simultaneously declare maintaining of garbage under sustainable waste management as an obligation of the Church.

Lessons learned:

Churches have played outstanding constructive role in creating enabling environment for the Northeast Region including Government, civil societies, associations and churches, and especially rural poor and marginalized group of society by providing appropriate space and education, addressing myriad issues of climate change that affects everyone's life; Established strong relationship with Civil societies and other key stakeholders and individuals; Distinctly recognized Church Institutions as essential contributors in controlling and mitigating the impacts of climate change in NE India. However, an appropriate systematic partnership with governments, civil societies and other stakeholders needs to be strengthening as an urgent call to action. Hence, the policy effort to engage Churches council/association as key partners and player in implementing national, regional and state climate change and environmental policy and programmes are inevitable.

Sources:

ISPRS Archives XXXVIII-8/W3 Workshop Proceedings: Impact of Climate Change on Agriculture

World Council of Churches: Human Rights Council, Geneva, February 6, 2015

Manipur Baptist Convention: Environment & climate policy, 2015

<https://www.nbcc-nagaland.org/>

<https://www.eacinet.org/mbc.php/>

CASA's policy and position paper on climate change: final draft

CASA-NEI Report/ Communication/Documentation 2010-15.....



"There is nothing either good or bad, but thinking makes it so."

— *William Shakespear*



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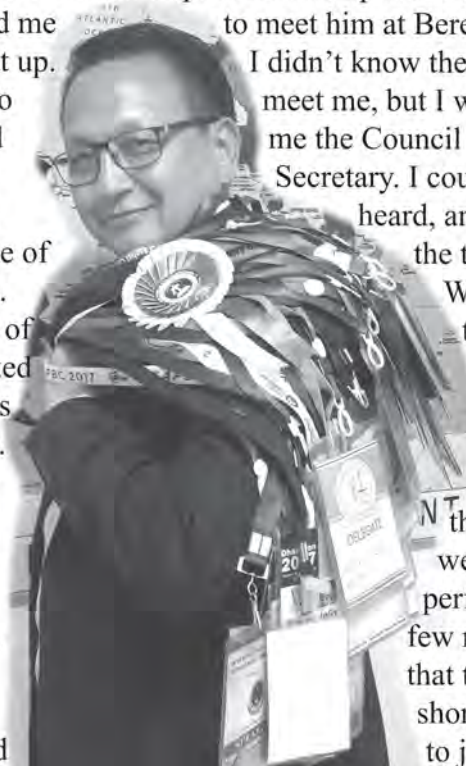


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e-mail: dean.agstnei@gmail.com/Ph.No +919366364080

My Memorable 10 Years in CBCNEI

I write this report as a way of saying “Thank you” to the whole CBCNEI family for the opportunity given to me to serve the Lord through the ministry of the Council. Experience of ten years cannot be penned down in these few pages. However, few things that I remember, I would like to share with you.

My entry: It was in the latter part of 2009, the then General Secretary Rev. Dr. A.K. Lama came to Manipur as Resource person for Union Tangkhul Church Imphal leadership training. One evening he called me to meet him at Berean Lodge where he was put up. I didn't know the reason why he wanted to meet me, but I went and met him. He told me the Council was looking for Mission Secretary. I couldn't believe what I just heard, and he also told me I was one of the three short-listed candidates. When I asked the names of the other two, I was shocked to learn they were leaders whom I highly respected. So I told Dr. Lama not to invite me, but take one of them since I know them very well, and I know they will perform better. However, a few months later I was told that the search committee had shortlisted me and I was invited to join the



Council. Had I been called for interview with the other two great leaders, I would have never appeared for the interview. So I came and joined the Council in the month of May 2010 with great excitement.

In the Office: Known for its legacy, I came in with great expectation to do the best I can as the Lord leads. I was not disappointed, but surprised that there was no file, no computer and no mission policy laid down; just an empty table and a chair. I went through the Constitution and started praying to God to give me clear vision where I should begin and end. The first thing I did was called for a consultation for all Mission Secretaries to listen to them and see how the Council can be of help to them. They shared their precious thoughts and I know what I am supposed to do. I also requested the Executive Committee to include all Convention Mission Secretaries in the Mission Board for better coordination and cooperation. This worked very well, and I am thankful to the Executive Committee for accepting this proposal.

Few new initiatives undertaken are:

1. **CDW Concept:** Because of the threats and for better mission work in building relationship in the mission fields, we developed a concept where missionaries and evangelists are given the designation as Community Development Workers (CDW). They were trained on Development concept through our partners. As we give them CDW identity cards, they were also trained on some skills such as farming and animal husbandry. We also come up with project support to suit their designation.
2. **Mission Policy:** Clear Mission policy was laid down so that we know the roles of the mission department of the Council, Conventions and Associations. This has helped us to not duplicate and overlap the work in mission but cooperate and support each other much better.
3. **Missionary Training Programs:** Other than the usual missionary training program, we also introduced trainings such as English Teachers' Training, Business as Mission and Cross

cultural trainings. This is to enable our missionaries to go to other countries as English teachers where there are demands, especially Eastern Asian Countries. This way they can go to different countries and serve the Lord.

4. **Missionary Care Training:** Missionary Care Training was new to many of our Associations and Churches though few were aware of. All mission secretaries were first called and given this training, and they are now training their churches on how we need to care our missionaries.
5. **Partnership:** Looking into the need of our churches, we were able to introduce 8 mission organizations to partner them in our mission work. Our churches have benefitted a lot through this partnership.
6. **Strategic Engagement Mission Strategy:** Burdened by the vast unreached nations within India, we developed a strategy where every Association will be engaged with one unreached nation so that there will be equal distribution of laborers and there will be no confusion and conflict in the mission fields. Over 70 Associations have taken the pledge to pray for specific unreached nation within India. This has also helped us to reach more nations (people groups) in our country.
7. **Mission Handbook:** Long awaited, and yet very needed mission handbook entitled “*His story in the history of CBCNEI Mission*” was published where the list of all evangelists and missionaries supported by our Associations and their mission fields are recorded. This helped us to see where our churches are working and the areas where no one is working. This will help us to connect ourselves better in the mission work.
8. **Urban Mission:** Urban Mission strategy was new to many of our associations and therefore special urban focused trainings were conducted and churches were encouraged to focus the Urban since more population has been and will be shifting to the urban areas. As a pilot project, we have started *Guwahati*

City Mission supported by the *Garo Baptist Convention Mission Department*. This mission strategy can be used as our churches starts focusing urban cities.

- 9. Mission Legacy Building:** Looking into the needs of our missionaries and evangelists, where churches hardly pay any ministry allowance, we came up with the plan to construct a building to generate income for missionary support. Therefore, with the kind permission from the Executive Committee, we are starting income generating building. The income we generate from this building will be used to support missionaries and evangelists supported by our Churches and Associations. This will go to them as Ministry allowances and Project support in the mission fields.

My pledge: Though I relinquish my responsibility as Mission Secretary of the Council, I know I am a family member of the Council, and therefore, I will make myself available to help our churches if there is any way I can be of some help.

Lastly, I want to thank all Secretaries whom I have worked with, all staff in the office for their cooperation and support. We have one of the best teams. I also want to thank all Churches, Associations, Conventions and organization who have invited me in their programs as resource person or speaker. I am humbled as I recall the love you have given to me. I can proudly say that I may be one of the most loved by you all. I and my family want to say thank you to you all. We are greatly indebted to you. May the Lord richly bless CBCNEI as we continue to serve Him faithfully.

Amen.



ADVENT OF' 20

*Withstood a year
Has been a hangover
Hence, the New year
Pre vailing every where
Same time same hour
Drenching in new shower
Seems to be new pomp
Advent of new zeal and hope
As-Welkin-wrapped with dazzling star
Awaits-Gonna appear
Followed by gracing super a birth
Embraced self the globe to heart
Die lots and born
He is but immortal else lone
Uttering merely 'HIS' name
Turns sinner to Gem
A step into church in 'His' name
Be-Found divine touch go claim
A token of glory and charm
Let be fastened once ever last term.*

- Amal Dey

KANGPOKPI CHRISTIAN HOSPITAL, MANIPUR

Kangpokpi Christian Hospital was called Mission Hospital Manipur at first but changed to the present name in 1957-58. It was established by the pioneer American Baptist Foreign Missionaries way back in 1920 after the First World War. Dr. G.G. Crozier and his wife were the founders. They were sent from Tura to help Rev. W. Pettigrew in his mission work who already set up the Centre at Kangpokpi Mission Compound.

It is 45 kms from Imphal the capital of Manipur on the N.H. 39, 3 kms northern side amidst green tropical forest with pleasant climate all through the year. The Mission Compound has its water supply source a spring never run dry nor muddy even in adverse weather.

The Mission Centre was known all over Manipur state for its medical works and other mission activities at that period of time. Leprosy



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treatment Centre was known for its yeoman service. However, the Centre has been closed down in 1968. Orphanage was also opened; many destitute children were given shelter and education. However, in 1956 Foreign Missionaries were not permitted to stay any longer in this part of the country and therefore, responsibilities felt in the hands of national doctors. Eventually, Dr. W.G Momin and his wife were sent from Jorhat Christian Hospital to look after the hospital works in 1956. In 1968 after his retirement different doctors were sent but no one was permanently willing to stay. Finally, Dr. A. Hrahsel and his wife was sent to take over the hospital works, that was in 1971 as Medical superintendent. Dr. A. Hrahsel was an experience surgeon and his wife a dedicated staff of Jorhat tried their level best to revitalized the works of the hospital and improvement was seen in all areas of its activities. During his time, Middle School was opened for the staff children and later on upgraded to High School level. Seeing the need for a way of upliftment of the tribal girls in the field of education and employment, a Nursing School was established rendering training for Female Health Worker (ANM) in 1982. By the grace of God, the School got its affiliation from Indian Nursing Council and Manipur Nursing Council in 2012 with a permission to take 30 students each year. So far more than 500 students graduated from the school. We have about 30 nursing students at present. Every year in the month of July, new admission is opened.

After Dr. A. Hrahsel's retirement, the hospital cannot be as it was before because of the upcoming of different high-tech hospitals and clinics in the state but the hospital is still continuing its medical service to the needy and poor till today.

The hospital is charitable, non-profitable and self-support, income mainly from patients, in-patients etc. The hospital is under CBCNEI and day to day administration is under Administrative Committee appointed by MBC and CBCNEI.

At present the hospital has 40 beds and 40 devoted workers belonging to different communities with 4 doctors and one visiting Consultant. In

2019 we are able to procure the following new equipment for the hospital:

- i) Digital X-Ray
- ii) Baby Warmer
- iii) Phototherapy
- iv) CBC Machine
- v) Ultrasound
- vi) X-Ray Machine 300MA

The hospital and its ministry is now 100 years and if God willing we will be celebrating Centenary on **31st Oct. 2020**. To commemorate its 100 years of its existence, we have constructed “**Centenary Memorial Guest House**” which need lots of financial involvement. Therefore, it is our humble request to you all to pray and participate for the grand success of the celebration.



“To do the useful thing, to say the courageous thing, to contemplate the beautiful thing: that is enough for one man’s life.”

— *T.S. Eliot.*



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NEWS CAPSULES

Seminar on Human Trafficking by Justice and Peace Department

The Justice and Peace Department of the Council organized a seminar on Anti-Human Trafficking on Dec 6, 2019. Human Trafficking is the fastest growing crime and the second largest illegal trade in the world. Article 23 of the Constitution of India prohibits the trafficking of human beings and forced labour. North East India having beautiful natural and cultural diversity surrounded by the outsider which becomes the hotspot and targeted region for such evil actions. Therefore, Justice and Peace Department, CBCNEI keeps tracking and organising awareness program on Anti-Human Trafficking in different churches to create platform and to seriously and honestly deliberate on the issue and strengthen partnership to cohesively work together in addressing the issue and thus collectively contribute in the prevention, protection and rehabilitation of trafficking in persons and thus reduce the invincibility of the exploitation.



Shillong Tyrannus Hall New Chaplain:

God provides leadership for His church and ministries to continue the legacy of His faithfulness. This is true in the life of Shillong Tyrannus Hall ministry as we install new Chaplain in the person of Rev Dr Kansinlung Kamei on 15th Jan. He was the Academic Dean at Academy for Theology and Mission, Dimapur. His wife Unice Achumi Kamei is a Pastoral Ministry experience at Nagamese Baptist Church Dimapur. They have two children - Jaithuiliu Kamei 10 years old and Gaisuaklung Kamei 6 years old.



Monsang Naga Baptist Association Triennial Fellowship: Under the theme “The joy of serving Christ” (John12:26), the Monsang Association had their triennial fellowship at Heibunglok Baptist Church during 7-9th Feb. First time the Mission Secretary of the Council preached the Word under an umbrella. In spite of rain, people were attentive and no one moved out of the hall. It was a blessed fellowship.



Liangmai Naga Baptist Association (Manipur) Men's Conference: The LNBA-M had their men's conference during 11-14th Feb under the theme, "A faithful man" at Malek Baptist Church. Thousands of men gathered for the conference. They were encouraged to be faithful in their personal life, relationship with God, family life and in the society.



Anal Naga Baptist Association Mission Conference:

The ANBA organized 3rd Mission Conference during 25 - 27 Feb at Thungcheng Baptist Church. The theme of the Conference was, "The harvest truly is plentiful, but the laborers are few" (Matt. 9:37). Though it was called Mission Conference, special emphasis was given to Missionary Care. The leaders realized they have not cared enough for the missionaries, and agreed to treat the Missionaries with dignity. The Conference was an eye opener since Missionary care was first introduced during this conference.



January - June 2020

Consultation on Vision 2020 and beyond:

The KABC had a Consultation program on "Vision 2020 and beyond," on 27th Feb at Jirsong Asong, Diphu. Vision 2020 and beyond is a newly adopted strategy to boost mission and over all development of the KABC and its churches. The program was attended by Association leaders. Mr. Kamson Rongphar, Mission Secretary of KABC thoroughly discussed the viability of the vision concept with the members through interactive sessions. The core substance of the Vision is to reach the unreached through the thrust of "One Mission" by all departments under the Convention, Association and Church as well. The strategic Vision will be further shared for full understanding and cooperation in church level under every Association.



KABC Executive Committee: The KABC Executive Committee was held on 28th Feb at Jirsong Asong from 8:30 AM. During the EC meeting various agenda were deliberated and planning for 2020 and beyond were being made. The meeting was chaired by Mr. Nshenthang Rengma, President of KABC and Mr. Joysing Ronghang, Vice President. Rev. Davidson Ingti, the General Secretary of KABC took the house through the prepared agenda during which time, the ownership and financial support matters to NECU and financial assistance to Kangpokpi Christian Hospital were also requested to the house.



Officers' Tour to WRBA church: Mr. Nshenthang Rengma, the President of KABC and Rev. Davidson Ingti, General Secretary of KABC and accompanied by Mr. Monison Teron, Youth Secretary, made an official tour to Longlashongnyu Baptist Church under Western Rengma Baptist Association (WRBA) on 7th March, 2020. The next day (Sunday), the team attended worship service. During worship service, the Youth Secretary spoke on the current ministries of the KABC followed by God's message by the General Secretary. The visit of the team was a blessing to the church members. Mr. Gwasheng Jishing is the pastor of the said church which has 33 families. The team also visited the headquarter of WRBA at A-Jongpha and had a brief meeting with the Executive Secretary of WRBA Mr. Eshachor Rengma over a cup of coffee and sweet meat.

40th Annual General Meeting of KABC:

The 40th AGM of KABC was held at Eralibill Garo Baptist Church, Dimapur, from 13-15 March, 2020. The main theme of the AGM was **“Together in Mission.”** Leaders along with delegates from the 13 Associations under KABC attended the program. The theme and topics of this year’s annual meeting primarily focused on One Mission of the KABC “Vision 2020 and beyond’s concept. The main speaker, Rev. Dr. Jolly Rimai, Mission Secretary of the Council of Baptist Churches in North East India (CBCNEI) spoke on the topics of “Purpose Driven Mission,” “Mandate on Mission,” and “One in Mission.” Dr. Jolly said that the heart of God for men is for ALL to be saved from the destruction of sin and hell. “This is the one and only desire”, he said. For this one purpose, God sent His Only Son to save men. “For this one reason, God sent us to seek and to save the lost, to complete the work Jesus has started! If the church today does not focus on saving men, then this church is no better than a mere NGOs” he further concluded. Rev. Davidson Ingti, General Secretary of KABC also delivered the keynote address on the inaugural evening of the program from the main theme.

On the morning of the second day of the annual meeting, the President of KABC Mr. Nshenthang Rengma hoisted the flag of KABC followed by the departments of KABC and all the 13 associations with a closing prayer pronounced by Mr. Joysing Ronghang, the Vice President of KABC. After breakfast the respective departments had their own general meetings. After lunch there was a joint general meeting in which prepared agenda were discussed and adopted.



Baptist News

On the morning of last day of the program, the host church and Association organized a Garo cultural extravaganza after which morning worship service was conducted and during which time, a large number of members turned up for worship. Rev. Dr. (Prof.) Akheto Sema, the General Secretary of CBCNEI kindly attended the morning worship service and greeted all the participants who also invited the KABC leaders to his own home for a tea break. Post lunch, a Panel Discussion session was conducted on the KABC Vision 2020 and beyond program implementation. Mr. Joysing Ronghang, the VP moderated and Mr. Kamson Rongphar, Mission Secretary of KABC and Mr. Milton Terang, Finance Secretary of KABC were the panelists. The discussion came up with positive adoption and affirmation for implementation by all the participants.

During this meeting, the Thadou Baptist Association, Assam was also accepted into the fold of KABC, making the KABC family into 14 Associations.

Heart touching Praise & Worship and Choir were presented by the Western Rengma Baptist Association's youth while special numbers were brought by students of Christian English High School, Diphu, the education institute of KABC. The hospitalities of the host church and Association (A'chik Baptist Krima) were very good and were appreciated. Convention and Association leaders were welcomed with Garo traditional mufflers, shawls and jackets for different categories of participants. The 40th AGM of KABC successfully concluded with manifold blessings received by the participants through the words of God brought by His messengers.



Lewis Memorial students on a Mission Trip

As reported by Mr Wati, LM Student Ministry

Along with the Chaplain 8 students from LM (Lewis Memorial) Students ministry had the best time with maximum blessings and lots of memories during **Mission Trip to Dharan, Nepal 29th January to 2nd February 2020.**

We visited two house fellowships under different churches. We conducted praise and worship, shared testimonies, presented special songs along with messages. We were also invited to Zion Methodist



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church devotional service where we presented group song, solo and shared God's Word. Indeed, it was a time for us to witness the worshippers having a blessed time together.

Sharing powerful life changing testimonies was a great platform. Our Chaplain, Tali Moa delivered the congregation about the ***Strength of Unity among believers.***

During our last night we had a fellowship with the church elders and youth leaders at the base. It was blessed time where we share our personal experiences and worshipped together.

We are looking forward to do such ministries again according to God's will.

Lastly, thanks to CBCNEI student's ministry for giving us such a rare opportunity. I believe this wonderful experiences will be our gospel memories.



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- Michael Dell

1st CBCNEI Mission Conference Report

As reported by Rev Dr Jolly Rimai, Mission Secretary, CBCNEI

Wolfgang Gunther once said: “All mission conferences are occasions where we are called to make new discoveries of the grace and power of God, for ourselves, for the Church and the world, to face the new age and the new task with a new consecration.” This is precisely what the 1st CBCNEI Mission Conference has achieved: A new consecration to face the mission challenges of the new age and also to discover anew the divine grace and power.



January - June 2020

The 1st CBCNEI Mission Conference was conducted from 18th to 20th February 2020 under the leadership of CBCNEI Mission Secretary Rev Dr Jolly Rimai, hosted by Mission Department of Manipur Baptist Convention (MBC) under the theme, “*Into the Deep*” *Luke 5:4*. The messengers for this conference were Rev Prof Akheto Sema, General Secretary, CBCNEI, Rev Dr Vee Tetseo, General Secretary, APBF, Rev Dr Ashok Andrews, Pastor, Kolkata Christian Fellowship. The second day of the program started with an inauguration of monolith by President of CBCNEI Mr R. K. Raychawdhuri.

During the conference more than 750 delegates representing the associations and conventions assembled at the Manipur Baptist Convention Centre Church Imphal (MBCCCI) to commemorate the 1st CBCNEI Mission conference. In addition to the convention delegates, local participants also attended the conference. The enthusiastic participation of delegates exemplified their deep commitment to world mission and church unity.

Stories from our missionaries Rev Asinlo Khing, Mrs. Irish S. Momin and Mr. Jim Panmei added flavor to the conference. Many were blessed and encouraged by their stories.

First Day, 17th February: On the opening session of the conference Rev Dr W. Konghar, General Secretary of Manipur Baptist Convention gave welcome speech and Rev Dr Jolly Rimai, Mission Secretary of CBCNEI took the time of introduction of the delegates, messengers (speakers) and invitees. It was an honor that the 1st Mission co-ordinator of CBCNEI Rev Taku Longkumer and his wife Rev Katie Longkumer, and 1st





CBCNEI Mission Secretary Rev Dr Dusanu Venyo attended the conference and brought greetings.

Without the music of the faith which you bring us, we surely confess that the season would be something far less meaningful than it is. And certainly, Manipur Baptist Convention Choir, Arunachal Baptist Church Council Choir, Karbi Anglong Baptist Convention and Nagaland Baptist Church Council Choir bless extol God's name through angelic voices. MBCCCI Praise & Worship Team led the worship services. It was such a heart-warming praise and worship.

Second Day, 19th February: There was a special session of Talent and Cultural Events which was led by Ms Easter Shimray and MBC Co-ordinating Committee. People participated in various cultural events and exhibited their talents. There were singing, cultural presentation and many more. The conference has been without doubt, one of the most meaningful and successful gatherings in the recent past. It has received hundreds of responses and feedback of appreciation and affirmation of the way in which the conference was organized.

Your desire or will to serve would increase if you understand more fully the blessings associated with missionary service. God often reveals commandments and blessings together. And it was so blessed to listen the story of their missionary journey from Rev Asinlo Khing (NMM

Baptist News

Missionary), Mrs. Irish S. Momin (GBC Missionary) and Mr Jim Panmei (MBC Missionary).

As mentioned, the active participation of the CBCNEI member churches, was exceptional, making it a meaningful gathering. The conference was deeply moved by the warm hospitality and generosity offered by the local host committee of Manipur Baptist Convention, Mission Department. MBC with the close cooperation of all the mission secretaries under MBC churches, worked tirelessly to make all participants feel at home. The CBCNEI is immensely grateful to all of them for their dedicated leadership.

Indeed! This was the first CBCNEI Mission Conference to be held which was a major highlight. The conference offers multiple spaces for joyful celebrations, offers rich opportunities to be in God's presence, rejoicing and lamenting before the triune God. Participants meets each other for services – in the morning, at noon, and in the evening – which proved to be a well from which the participants drank deeply, finding unity and inspiration.

Guided and empowered by the word of God, enriched by moving musical and artistic performances, and lifted up by the multitude of songs and prayers from all the Conventions and Associations, the



conference affirmed its commitment to proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ in life, in word, and in deed. Yet another major highlight of CBCNEI mission conference was the substantial presence and dynamic participation and mission leaders from almost all the Associations. All of this was possible basically due to the abundant grace from the triune God and because of the sincere prayers and support of many, including the Mission Board of the CBCNEI, in particular their leadership, the Manipur Baptist Convention, and the local host committee in MBC.

The CBCNEI is proud of the fact that we could successfully organize such a meaningful event, which was huge in both quantitative and qualitative terms. The people were deeply moved by the hospitality and generosity shown by the Local Host Committee and the welcome extended by the MBC. The MBC Associations, in close cooperation with churches worked tirelessly with the practical arrangements throughout the week to make all the delegates feel comfortable and at home.



"Talent is cheaper than table salt. What separates the talented individual from the successful one is a lot of hard work."

- Stephen King

The tale of "The Sword..."



Mr N Peyong Maopa Konyak, S/o *Nyamnyei Taiwang Konyak* hails from *Yakshu village Baptist Church Mon District, Nagaland*. He was the pioneer Christian in Yakshu village in particular. After his conversion to Christianity called "AMANG" (AO Naga dialect), he struggled to evangelize the people from the village, around neighbors and could witness a great numbers of pagan people who were converted after the work of his evangelism.



On 19th October 1958, he surrendered his own beheaded head hunting "**Dao with its box**" to Rev Longri Ao, the then Executive Secretary of Konyak Baptist Church Association at Wakching Keangphang, (present Wakching town) when Konyak Baptist Church Mission was under Assam Baptist Church Association (ABCA), present Council of Baptist Churches in North East India (CBCNEI), as a sign of

surrendered and accepting Christianity from head hunting culture. **Rev Y. Chingang Konyak**, the author of "**Konyak Naga Today and Yesterday**" described **Mr Late Peyong Maopa Konyak** was the greatest warrior during his head hunting contemporary society.

On this day, 7th March 2020, Yakshu Baptist Church members, Pastor S. P. Yanyei, Nyamnyei (S/o Lt. Peyong Maopa Konyak) Angchai,

Angnyei, Langphong, visited CBCNEI office and donated the box and frame to preserved in the said office.

And I will give them one heart and I will put a new spirit within you. I will take the Stony heart out of their flesh and will give them a heart of flesh. That they may walk in my statutes, keep mine ordinances, do them, they shall be my people and I will be their God. Ezekiel 11:19-20.



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Covid – 19 Pandemic: A Theological Response

Rev Dr Yangkahao Vashum^{1}*

The whole world is at war again. A different kind of war, of course. And the world is under lockdown. The whole world has just one enemy. The enemy is invisible. And that enemy is called COVID – 19 (Coronavirus disease 2019); the disease caused by novel coronavirus. It all started in Wuhan city in China sometime in December 2019.² Since then, within short span of time Covid - 19 has humbled the world. It has singlehandedly brought the world to its knee. It has humbled the mighty, the powerful, the rich, the poor and the weak alike. It does not discriminate anyone on the basis of race, caste, gender, color, age, ideology and religion/faith or no faith. It gives damn thing about the world's boundaries and walls. It has no respect for anything and there is nothing this enemy can't reach or go. The world's most sophisticated arsenals and weapons are of no match before this enemy. The World Health Organization (WHO) declared Covid - 19 as pandemic on March 11, 2020.³ This is the first pandemic caused by coronavirus and a pandemic that the world has never before seen that can be controlled. The enemy is fast, furious, and ruthless to the core and deadly. It shows no mercy to the victims. So far, Covid - 19 has claimed over two lakhs lives globally and still counting. According to the latest WHO updates, there are 238 730 confirmed deaths, and 3 356 205 confirmed cases in 215 countries/areas/territories (worldwide).⁴ What is even more troubling is that experts are warning that the disease may linger on for much longer period of time and that

vaccine may never be developed.⁵

The whole world has come to a standstill. Everywhere, there is lockdown. Roads and streets look deserted. Businesses and the economic power houses have been forced to close down. Schools, colleges and other educational training/coaching institutions are in lockdown as all the rest of public gathering places such as restaurants, cinema halls and theatres, malls, gyms, sports complexes, etc. Social, political, cultural and all kinds of public gatherings have been closed down. Religious places and places of worship including churches have been closed down as well. Further, almost all domestic and international travels by air, roads, train, sea and other modes of travel have been cancelled and stopped. No one and no power on earth can enforce such lockdown of global scale the way Covid - 19 has singlehandedly commanded. No, no one.

To combat against this invisible enemy, the expert's advice that the best response is to take precaution and preventive measures: maintain social (physical) distancing, personal hygiene, stay home and stay safe. In other words, LOCKDOWN is the only answer for now.

The world is mystified and bewildered on the question of the origin of the novel coronavirus. All kinds of theories are floating and are being advanced – from accidental leakage from Wuhan Institute of Virology research lab to animals in Wuhan wet market. According to WHO, the novel coronavirus is “natural in origin.”⁶ Notwithstanding this assertion, all kinds of theories abound and TV and numerous social media are filled with wild and passionate debates, with no definitive answer in sight. In the midst of all this, fake news is flourishing and wildly circulated adding to more confusion and woes, even putting lives at risk. Avalanche of unreliable and false information including the origin of the virus to symptom of the disease to try unproven remedies for curing is spreading around the world to such an extent, that UNESCO, the UN educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, has to time and again intervene to “counter falsehood and promote facts about the virus.”⁷

Faith Response to Covid - 19 pandemic

Coming to the responses of the faith community, from the faith perspectives, there are as well all kinds of reasons and explanations doing the rounds. There are some who openly declare that the pandemic

is God's curse to the world because of the wickedness of humanity. Some even declare that God is punishing the world because of the evils of homosexuality and same sex marriages, abortions and other sins. Many more believe that it is God's doing - the fulfillment of biblical prophecies. And they predict, the end time is near! Many more believe otherwise. God is not responsible for the calamities such as this – Covid-19 pandemic. It is human made; humans are responsible. Some believe that although God is not the cause of the disease, God allows things to happen. So we have here divergent views and explanations about the cause and reasons for such happenings.

Theologically, there is no easy answer to this pandemic. People are asking serious and critical questions. Why all this? Is God behind all this? Why so many people have to die? Why people have to suffer such loss and pain? Are humans responsible for all this? Is this because of human wickedness and sins...? Or could it be possible that things happen as they are in accordance with the laws of nature? No one really has the answer. The world continues to look for answers.

One thing we know for sure, that is, the insatiable human greed and desires for more. The earth and its resources are fast depleting and the earth is pushed to its limit. The ruthless rape of mother earth to satiate human greed and wants continues unabatedly. In the name of development and growth, limitless destruction of natural resources has resulted in the severe ecological imbalances in the world. Humans have been invading the homes and habitats of animals, birds, and other living organisms and creatures constantly as a result they have been pushed to the wall. All these have resulted in destroying the biodiversity which is critical for maintaining ecological balance. Global warming and depletion of ozone layers have devastating consequences resulting in the kind of climate change that we are experiencing today.

Human greed and desires for more know no bounds. Humans have gone even to the extent of producing and selling fake rice⁸ and other potentially hazardous food items for human consumption. Today, there is not a single food produce which has not been contaminated by chemicals, insecticides, pesticides and other hazardous chemicals. Human greed and desires for more has no respect for anyone; it has no respect for life.

Human greed and desires for more know no bounds. The mighty and powerful, the rich and wealthy including the big and powerful Corporations, value wealth and riches more than human life – “The winners take all.” They have no qualms about destroying and trampling the poor and the powerless, their rights and dignity; no qualms in robbing and grabbing away the land, forest and other resources to which many poor indigenous people depend their lives. They have no qualms in exploiting the poor and the needy. They profess “might is right” and they are driven by their ambition, “Sky is the limit.” And the irony is that the faith community justifies them in the name of prosperity theology/gospel – they claim they receive them as blessings from God!

In the name of advancing human innovation and invention, today, humans have gone even to the extent of becoming like God. Human intelligence is a wonderful gift of God. But humans are abusing this precious and wonderful gift for their vested interests. Have humans then usurped the place of God as well? Have humans gone to the extent of deciding who should live and who should not which is the prerogative of God alone?

As the world continues to battle against this war – Covid - 19 and search for answers (perhaps the world might never know the answer), one thing we know: God is love and God cares. God values life. God is just and righteous. God is compassionate and merciful. God’s love is not coercive but persuasive. God suffers with us in our pain and suffering - God is our co-sufferer. The cross of Jesus is the supreme example of God’s love for the world and the supreme symbol of God suffering with us. And the resurrection of Jesus Christ is the symbol of hope and life. We know, Covid - 19 Pandemics is not the end, how painful and how great the loss might be. Because, we believe in the resurrection! At the same time, we know, we are called to be responsible stewards. We are ultimately accountable and answerable to God.

It must be noted that while Covid - 19 does not discriminate anyone, it will be simplistic and irresponsible to suggest that everyone is equally impacted. It is again, the poor and the needy who have been the most vulnerable and affected lots. They are vulnerable in all fronts. Economically, they are disadvantaged when it comes to testing and getting treatment (unless they are taken care by the government or concerned

institutions), to take care of their families during the long drawn lockdown period, etc. Many have lost their jobs and are unemployed. Many are literally struggling for their survival. The rich and well-off have always been in a much better off position in all counts; it is true even today. In India, the poor migrant workers have borne the worst brunt during this lockdown period. Many have been stranded and they are caught in between. Women and children are also among the most vulnerable and affected ones. During the lockdown, cases of domestic violence against women and abuse of children in different forms have alarmingly increased across the globe.⁹

Silver lining in the midst of Covid - 19 tragedy

It is said, “Every cloud has a silver lining.” In the midst of the Covid -19 pandemic, as the world continues to experience painful and heart wrenching moments for the loss of their dear and loved ones and as many souls continue to battle for their lives, there are as well some bright side of the pandemic: For once, the earth and everything in it could have the long needed rest for their rejuvenation. The ecological imbalance due to human activities has been reduced. We are experiencing cleaner environment. Noise and air pollution are drastically down. The sky looks clear and cleaner. The air we breathe is cleaner, the water we drink is purer, the rivers and streams look cleaner; the flowers, plants and the whole vegetations look refreshingly beautiful; the birds, animals and all the living creatures and organisms seem to have gotten back their life again – creation is refreshingly alive!

Humanity seem to have learned anew the value of life and the limits of life; the importance and values of relationship; the importance and values of family; the importance and values of rest and health; the importance and values of time.

Humanity seem to have rediscovered their spiritual root and reconnected (spiritually) to their Source and Fountain of life – God! Humanity seem to have rediscovered the importance of prayer life and dependence on God. Humanity seem to have learned some lessons on humility and its values as well as lessons on integrity and justice.

In the midst of this pain and suffering, the world has as well experienced the good side of humanity. Many have demonstrated that

humans are caring, kind, loving, willing to risk and sacrifice their lives for others; many have shared generously their resources to others, etc. The world has witnessed the best of humanity in all this as well.

Voices from Indigenous Peoples around the World: What can we Learn?

According to Indigenous leaders from around the world who gathered on March 13, in New York City, for a panel on Indigenous rights, deforestation and related health endemics, “COVID-19 and other health endemics are directly connected to climate change and deforestation.”¹⁰ I have reproduced here the statements of the Indigenous leaders who spoke in New York City:

The coronavirus is telling the world what Indigenous Peoples have been saying for thousands of years — if we do not help protect biodiversity and nature, we will face this and even worse threats. The coronavirus reminds us that the balance of the Earth is in danger, and we need to maintain our delicate balance of diversity. More than 25 per cent of medicine comes from forests. If we lose our forests, we lose our medicines, too. In our communities, we have respected a certain biodiversity that protects us today. We plant what we eat, and we have the resources and knowledge needed to get through times like this, and this is what we are trying to tell the rest of the world. [Levi Sucre Romero, a BriBri Indigenous person from Costa Rica and co-coordinator of the Mesoamerican Alliance of Peoples and Forests (AMPB)].

The cure for the next pandemic, and even for this one, can be found in the biodiversity of our Indigenous lands. This is why we need to protect our lands and rights, because the future of life depends on it. Indigenous Peoples are at risk for defending diversity, biodiversity, for defending our lands, protecting the environment and trying to stabilize climate change. Health endemics like coronavirus are proof of the destruction of the forests and the climate, and we will continue to fight against deforestation and related viruses, for the balance of the planet. [Dinamam Tuxá, coordinator of the Articulation of the Indigenous Peoples of Brazil, lawyer and Indigenous social activist].

The orientation of our communities is sustainability. While everyone is trying to find solutions on what to do to face climate change, they look to the cities, but no one is looking at what we are doing in the villages and communities. I remember one elder told me, the problem with city people is they eat and drink dead things ... they drink dead water in plastic bottles and eat dead food from supermarkets. There is no guarantee that any of it will be safe. If the world worked to strengthen the rights of Indigenous Peoples, who have learned to live in nature and protect animal and plant species, we would see fewer epidemics such as the one we are currently facing. [Mina Setra, a Dayak Pompakng Indigenous person from West Kalimantan, Indonesia, and deputy secretary-general of the Indigenous Peoples Alliance of the Archipelago (IPAA)].

The world needs to listen to the indigenous peoples and learn from them. Indigenous knowledge and practices have been even proven and supported by science and scientific research.¹¹ Everything including humanity and the whole of creation are inter-related and connected. What one does therefore affects the rest. We are all connected and destined to be together.

So, what have we learned out of this Covid - 19 pandemic? Or to put it differently, what has Covid - 19 pandemics to teach us?

Covid – 19 pandemic reminds us to:

1. *Return to the Creator God, the Source and Fountain of our life and the universe; know that our lives are in God's hand: "Rend your hearts and not your clothing. Return to the LORD, your God, for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love, and relents from punishing." (Joel 2: 13); "If my people who are called by my name humble themselves, pray, seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land," (2 Chron. 7: 14).*
2. *Return to the paths of repentance and seek forgiveness; abandon arrogance, domineering, exploitative, oppressive*

and discriminatory attitudes and ways of life: “Seek the LORD while he may be found, call upon him while he is near; let the wicked forsake their way, and the unrighteous their thoughts; let them return to the LORD, that he may have mercy on them, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon,” (Isaiah 55: 6-7); “If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he who is faithful and just will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” (I John 1: 8-9).

3. *Return to mother earth, who nourishes and sustains us with her abundant and bounteous produces daily:* “Then God said, ‘Let the earth put forth vegetation: plants yielding seed, and fruit trees of every kind on earth that bear fruit with the seed in it.’ And it was so. The earth brought forth vegetation: plants yielding seed of every kind, and trees of every kind bearing fruit with the seed in it. And God saw that it was good.” (Gen. 1: 11-12); “The LORD will make you abound in prosperity, in the fruit of your womb, in the fruit of your livestock, and in the fruit of your ground in the land that the LORD swore to your ancestors to give you. The LORD will open for you his rich storehouse, the heavens, to give the rain of your land in its season and to bless all your undertakings,” (Deut. 28: 11-12).
4. *Return to the attitude of respect for all humanity and the whole of creation; know that everything is inter-related and connected:* “In the day that the LORD God made the earth and the heavens, when no plant of the field was yet in the earth and no herb of the field had yet sprung up—for the LORD God had not caused it to rain upon the earth, and there was no one to till the ground; but a stream would rise from the earth, and water the whole face of the ground— then the LORD God formed man from the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and the man became a living being,” (Gen. 2: 4b-7). In fact, the whole chapter is about inter-relatedness of cosmos, humankind and creation.
5. *Return to choose and value life:* “I call heaven and earth to witness against you today that I have set before your life and

death, blessings and curses. Choose life so that you and your descendants may live,” (Deut. 30:19); “The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly,” (John 10: 10); “For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord,” (Rom. 6: 23).

6. *Return to the attitude of humility, love and service:* “Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.” (Matt. 5:5); “Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves. Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others. Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross,” (Phil. 2: 4-8).
7. *Return to the life of justice and righteousness:* “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.” (Matt. 5:4); “But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream,” (Amos 5: 24); “He has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?” (Micah 6: 8).
8. *Return to the need based life style and sharing of resources; abandon human greed and unlimited wants:* “The earth is the LORD’s, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it,” (Ps. 24:1). “Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment. Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share. In this way they will lay up treasure for themselves as a firm foundation for the coming age, so that they may take hold of the life that is truly life,” (I Tim. 6: 17-19).
9. *Return to value rest and quality of life:* “And on the seventh

day God finished the work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all the work that he had done. So God blessed the seventh day and hallowed it, because on it God rested from all the work that he had done in creation.” (Gen. 2: 2-3); “But in the seventh year there shall be a Sabbath of complete rest for the land, a Sabbath for the LORD: you shall not sow your field or prune your vineyard. You shall not reap the aftergrowth of your harvest or gather the grapes of your unpruned vine: it shall be a year of complete rest for the land,” (Lev. 25: 4-5).

10. *Return to the attitude of grateful hearts and grateful living before God:* “And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in the one body. And be thankful.” Col. 3: 15); “The LORD is my strength and my shield; in him my heart trusts; so I am helped, and my heart exults, and with my song I give thanks to him,” (Ps. 28: 7); “Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things.” (Phil. 4: 8).

Conclusion

I conclude in the words of St. Paul who exhorted the believers in Philippi: “Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.” (Phil. 4: 6-7).

(Footnotes)

¹* Rev. Dr Yangkahao Vashum is Professor of Systematic Theology at the Eastern Theological College, Jorhat, Assam, India. He can be reached at yvashum@gmail.com

² According to the WHO timeline on Covid-19, on December 31, 2019, “Wuhan Municipal Health Commission, China, reported a cluster of cases of pneumonia in Wuhan, Hubei Province. A novel coronavirus was eventually identified,” <https://www.who.int/news-room/detail/27-04-2020-who-timeline—covid-19> (28/04/2020).

³ “WHO Director-General’s opening remarks at the media briefing on COVID-19 - 11 March 2020,” <https://www.who.int/dg/speeches/detail/who-director->

general-s-opening-remarks-at-the-media-briefing-on-covid-19—11-march-2020 (28/04/2020).

⁴ <https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019> (04/05/2020)

⁶ “WHO chief reiterates coronavirus had natural origin,” in response to President Donald Trump’s allegation that the virus has its origin in China’s Wuhan Virology Institute. <https://www.indiatoday.in/world/story/who-chief-reiterates-coronavirus-had-natural-origin-1673535-2020-05-02> (03/05/2020).

⁷ “During this coronavirus pandemic, ‘fake news’ is putting lives at risk: UNESCO,” <https://news.un.org/en/story/2020/04/1061592> (04/05/2020).

⁸ “Is ‘plastic rice’ for real?” “The term ‘plastic rice’ first surfaced in China in 2010. Dubbed the Wuchang rice scandal, Chinese officials unearthed a scam by companies who passed off ordinary rice as premium Wuchang rice by adding flavours to it. The Wuchang rice, known for its unique aroma, is exported to various nations. Chinese traders are believed to have made a huge profit through this scam. In 2011, a report by *The Korea Times* said: “Some distributors are selling fake rice in Taiyuan, Shaanxi Province, and this rice is a mixture of potatoes, sweet potatoes and plastic.” Needless to say, the report mentioned in detail the hazards of eating synthetic resin. Thus the term ‘plastic rice’ came into existence.”

In India, “The Telangana Civil Supplies Department is being flooded with complaints about hotels in the twin cities of Hyderabad and Secunderabad using ‘plastic rice’ in their food items. Samples have been collected from various hotels to verify the claims. And this is not limited to Telangana alone. Over the past few years, rumors of ‘plastic rice’ being sold have been doing the rounds and a public interest litigation was even filed before the Delhi High Court.”

<https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/is-plastic-rice-for-real/article18761833.ece>; <https://www.snopes.com/fact-check/plastic-rice-from-china/> (04/05/2020).

⁹ “Lockdowns around the world bring rise in domestic violence,” <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2020/mar/28/lockdowns-world-rise-domestic-violence> (03/05/2020);

“Implement steps to curb domestic violence during Covid-19 lockdown: High Court to Centre, Delhi govt,” <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/politics-and-nation/implement-steps-to-curb-domestic-violence-during-covid-19-lockdown-high-court-to-centre-delhi-govt/articleshow/75249397.cms?from=mdr> (03/05/2020).

¹⁰ “COVID-19 crisis tells world what Indigenous Peoples have been saying for thousands of years,” <https://www.nationalobserver.com/2020/03/24/news/covid-19-crisis-tells-world-what-indigenous-peoples-have-been-saying-thousands-years> (04/05/2020).

¹¹ *Ibid.*



Brief history of Lt. Norun K. Sangma

Norun K. Sangma, daughter father Lt. Sampa D. Momin and mother Lt. Khilje K. Sangma was born on 7th February 1918, at Pochim Basty (Garogoan) under Sibsagar District (Assam).

Educational Qualifications: Matric passed in 1947 from Golaghat Gale Memorial High School, Barbheta, Assam.

Service:

- 1947-1970, she worked as a teacher for 23 years at Golaghat Christian girls School. she had involved in ***Seminar Teacher's Training at Nagaon.***
- 1970-1972, she was in Bangalore for 2 years doing her Bachelor of Divinity (BD) from ***United Theological College for Women.***
- 1972-1982, she was the ***First Women Secretary in CBCNEI, Panbazar, Guwahati.***
- 1982-1995, she was the Superintendent in White Memorial Girls Hostel, Satribari.

Over all she rendered her life in services for 46 years.

Biblical Education:

In 1951 she went to Leonard Theological College, Jabalpur India, deputed by the Golaghat for Bible Teaching.

While she was women Secretary in CBCNEI from 1972 -1982 she had visited countries like America, Phillipine, Hongkong, Bangkok, Singapore, Toronto in Canada. During her trip to America she also visited different missionary places specially where farmer missionaries were.

She got retired from White Memorial in 1996 and since then she was at Pillangkatta till 31st January 2020. She went to be with the Lord on Friday at 12:55am, 31st January.

RESPONSE BY THE CHURCH TOGETHER – COVID 19

Amrit Kumar Goldsmith

Psalm No 23:4

Even though I walk through the VALLEY OF THE SHADOW OF DEATH, I WILL FEAR NO EVIL, for YOU are with me.

Unfolding Corona virus scenario

In January when news from Wuhan started pouring in about CORONA Virus, it was a story of China to many of us. But when the first case of Corona Virus appeared in Kerela on 30th January, 2020, the Indians got alarmed. Then the Nizamuddin Jamati related person from Cachar district of Assam, was detected positive on 31st March 2020, the people of Assam got scared. The lockdown announcement of Government of India from 24th March, struck the reality that Corona Virus is next door. When through ORDER of the government the door of the religious places including the Church was closed and only three persons was allowed to enter the Church for Worship took the Faithful off balanced. When the criticisms of using mobile phone during Church worship services was at peak – the DIGITALIZED worship services is prescribed – the ZOOM App appeared as saviour to many – the Android Smart mobile phones became prized possessions.

RESPONSE BY THE CHURCHES TOGETHER – COVID 19 – shaping.

On 23rd March the Assam Christian Forum convened a meeting to discuss the role of the Church – COVID 19. Due order of the government to maintain social distancing the meeting was cancelled,

but through phone consultation it was decided to APPEAL to the churches for their contributions to organize relief to serve the people affected by the COVID Pandemic. The responses were spontaneous – The CBCNEI, Catholic Church, The CNI, The Presbyterian, Lutheran, Guwahati Christian Forum, North East Diocesan Social Service Society, The Churches Auxiliary for Social Action, The World Vision, the Bosco Reach-Out, EFI, TLA Education Foundation, many churches and Christian fellowships and individuals joined in. IT IS A WONDERFUL FEELING OF TOGETHERNESS during the worst CRISIS in human history.

The Council of Baptist Churches in NEI, became a hub and NEDSSS is the other hub for relief operation. 50 church Volunteers came forward to help in the relief operations. The Assam Baptist Convention, an organization of 921 Baptist churches in Assam is in the lead.

To identify the genuine Migrant workers, the widows, destitute and suffering poor, to serve with food provisions is challenging. Organizations like Guwahati Christian Forum, EFI, Dar-Ul-Masih, Inter Agency Group (A), the Christian Fellowships, World Vision, Bosco Reach-Out, PPS, came forward to identify the families who are in real need.

The Guwahati Christian Forum (a registered body of 54 church organizations and total 284 member churches and fellowships) is working side by side with Assam Christian Forum, is a sign of solidarity and oneness in purpose – glorifying the name of Jesus Christ.

The TOGETHERNESS of the Churches in COVID 19 CRISIS is a sign of HOLY SPIRIT's presence and guiding the WILL ON EARTH AS IT IS IN HEAVEN - AMEN



Beyond Covid-19 Christian Church in North East India

Dr Shimreingam L. Shimray
Professor, Eastern Theological College

Initially, before the term Covid-19 was coined by WHO we had been talking about coronavirus. However, in all our deliberation we had not considered that coronavirus would soon bring death upon our own society. But today, Covid-19 is no longer



external to us but causing us enough pain, loss and fear. Till the end of March 2020, the words like quarantine and lockdown were rather unfamiliar to most of us. But today, I seem to find it hard to end any telephone call without referring to either of them. Lockdown has taken control over our lives and apart from confining ourselves at home we cannot do anything. This pandemic is a threat to the total humanity of this century. A little mistake we make today may destroy our future. We need to adopt a constant, careful, compassionate and conscious lifestyle.

In January, when coronavirus initially attacked China we saw very different pictures like people falling on the street, in the office, at home, etc. and dying. But today the mode of virus infection and sickness seem to be different. It brings great fear to us because this disease is highly contagious and harmful. The virus is said to be strong and able to survive

on metal, wood, cloth, paper, etc. for long hours. In several cases, it is again asymptotic making medical fraternity more difficult. While we have a good report of recovery, there is also the report of high rate of fatality. Human fear has gone to the extent that a dead body should not be allowed to burry in the village cemetery because virus might spread even from the grave.

Though this has not been the first time that the world faces pandemic, yet, this is the first pandemic that has infected the highest number of people in the human history. We have no report of any pandemic that had claimed a greater number of victims than Covid-19. Therefore, it is a killer disease. It is no joke that over 500, 0000 fall sick as Covid-19 positive and killed more than 300, 000 people so far at the global level.

Today, Covid-19 is not simply a physical disease but a virus that has generated several conflicts and confusions. For instance, the world is sharply divided into two in the context of debate on who created, or who is responsible for this virus. Many strong nations have alleged that China is responsible as it began spreading from Wuhan; several formal intelligent investigation are being instituted and reports are being expected soon. Whereas, China seems to be refusing the concept of creating it and having it leaked from their laboratory on the basis that human beings have no capacity to create such kind of virus. At another level, there are endless blames to one another as who has brought Covid-19 to their country, their state, and their village, and about who are spreading.

To a certain extent, this pandemic is politicized. Medical attention is careful and active in some places, whereas, other areas belonging to the opposition party are not getting facilities to fight this pandemic. One of the worst things that has happened is *ostracization* of medical fraternity by the public. In a strict sense they are the frontrunners, the champions and their services should be credited with gratefulness. In the post-Covid-19 world, they should be rewarded and awarded more than anyone else. In our history, we have seen sportspersons, celebrities, writers, business persons, etc. who have been awarded. We should change the criteria and reward people who serve for humanity, rather.

Even though very few island nations have not been infected and affected

today we are experiencing global lockdown for the first time in history. This over a month lockdown is not easy. It has several serious impacts. It has made a very positive impact to the environment. The air is made cleaner. Many important cities whose pollution level was much above permissible level have come down to a liveable level. But on the other hand, the lockdown has stopped production processes. The market is empty. And yet it is not as simple as it looks today. There are few pertinent issues involved in it. There are thousands of migrant workers being displaced. They would never like to face such reality anymore in their life. In the case of producing nation like India withholding a month without production is a heavy damage to the economy. All kinds of transportation (except few for essential commodities) were suspended which has negatively impacted both market and revenue income. So a month lockdown is a threat to the future economy, especially, next year.

The lockdown has called to cancel thousands of programs of all kinds, be it political, social, religious, economic, etc. making everyone unable to think and plan with certainty. For thousands of believers this is the first time they experience suspension of worship on Sundays. It has become a part of our history. We all know that this is not a choice but a necessity to avoid any further damage to humanity. And of course, no believer has stopped worshipping God, rather, they have adopted a new form of worship at home in a small gathering or joining online worship for others.

In the past, we have faced pandemic like HIV-AIDS, EBOLA, SARS, etc. however, none of them had done damage as Covid-19 has done to the world. It has reaffirmed that life on earth is temporary, and that, none of us need to be greedy with wealth and life. In today's context, many people have testified that human wealth is not capable of saving lives. Rather, the rich are found to be weaker in immune system and weaker to resist virus attack. Or in other words, death is for everyone and no one is safe.

The Covid-19 has awakened people to realize that service to humanity is the best and the most rewarding service anyone can render. This pandemic has forced people to be different. Unlike, our past history of corruption, selfishness, nepotism, partiality, etc. the government and its agents are working round the clock to respond to the cries of the poor. Non-organized

sector employees and students who are stranded in their workplaces are being touched down to rescue from their situation. The labourers are being helped out. More than the past, Christian Organizations and NGOs are made to respond to human hunger and suffering. The perspective of mission is being changed towards what matters most.

Another realization is that the Governments are compelled to check their own status of medical capacity and facility to realize that their past has not been successful. In a strict sense, many of our states in north east India are incapable to combat Covid-19. But the good thing is that most of them are trying to improve their capacity. This is one of the greatest lessons being learned by poor states. Villagers are awakened to unite and protect their own villages.

People of all religions and even those who claim as non-religious are forced to bow and kneel to the divine who at the end is the only power that can rescue people from such novel disease. Christians of all nations have been awakened to be more religious than that nominalism. This reality reminds us that the Church exists in the world though it claims of not belonging to it. The world and the Church face the difficulty together. We live as per the directive of the state but at the same time the state appeal the church to pray for the safety of people.

However, if we carefully look into the effort the Christian church has taken we see true picture of the present Christianity. We know few local churches have contributed cash and kinds to the poor and needy. But it has never been as per the capacity it has towards humanity. In certain cases, the church becomes an agent to collect cash and kinds from well-wishers and pass on to the poor without touching her own financial account. Yet we are all happy with local churches that have taken part in responding to the pandemic. I am not impressed by the way most strong and rich Christian churches taken the position of observer; hiding from the face of difficult reality. While some Christian organizations prefer to simply issue statement of solidarity with the affected. I am most impressed by the Sikh community who volunteered to provide food to thousands of stranded migrants and students in many parts of India. That is a true colour of religious ministry and mission in time of national difficulty.

Today, what we need to remind ourselves is that we should not misunderstand and misinterpret the situation. For instance, Christians are not worshipping in the churches on Sundays but that does not in any way mean that they are becoming irreligious. Though there are few things we do differently the Covid-19 has never weakened the faith of the Christians. Rather, it has stimulated and instilled a sense of true religiosity of the people. We should rather look at it and see that this pandemic has taught us digital giving and digital worship. I take my own church as an example and see that there is not a single Christian regular worship is forfeited. Every Sunday, one of the pastors preached through video and maximum number of members enjoyed the worship. That was the same case with Good Friday and Easter and so there is no loss but it is simply a matter that we go digital.

I am aware that some church leaders are becoming too much conscious of financial loss when there is no worship and offerings are not collected. But I look at it from a little different angle and see that there are more people who come forward to partner with the churches in relief program and mission. So there is no loss of anything. As it has been repeatedly talked about, it is not wrong to come under lockdown because it is not a question of laziness and unwillingness to come and gather or follow daily routine, but a matter of security and safety.

Along with the above indications we need to be further cautious about the future as well. We need to be sensitive and calculative in the light of the present pandemic. We should know that more than a month is lost without labour and process of production which means that, there can be less harvest this year and create negative impact for next year. We should be able to read and understand that money is not everything. There can be a time when we have enough money, but then, it cannot buy any when there is no stock in the market. We do not eat and drink money and thus it has value only when it can exchange with something. Otherwise, it is valueless.

The best lesson we can learn from this pandemic experience is that the government, NGOs, Church and its related organizations keep serving the most needed person, area and community. The State and the Church should not maintain colour, caste and religion in all contexts. Privilege

and under-privilege is not reserved to a class of people. It would change. But we must learn that service to the weakest is the best. The world has spent billions of dollars within 4 months but it is worth it because that is spent to save life. Anything spent for causing harm to humanity is not worth but every penny spent for health and security is worthwhile.

This pandemic has given a clear direction of mission and ministry to the Christian church. Christian churches should be more purposeful to the reality of time. We do not have a future in which we compete with size and height of the church building; people constructing mansions to live in but all what we have should be directed to the humanity. Our mission and ministry should not be defined by how much wealth we have in the bank but what are the needs of our customers. Anything we spend should be evaluated in the light of the condition of beneficiaries. The Christian church is not a club who raises fund and provides reliefs to the weak but it is a body itself and she has to do her own ministry.

We are not expected to be observers in times of difficulty but proactive in serving the most needy class of people. It is okay to touch our bank account for the sake of serving to the humanity. The Christian church is nobody but we the members and we are reminded that service is evangelism. People of other faiths do not want to see only those tall church buildings but a good and meaningful ministry to the people. We do not need to be Christians for celebrations but Christians of performing church. We should be able to calculate the level of impact of the way we conduct worship online through youtube. If people become habit of not going to the Church and expect youtube sermon. Or if sermons of tall preachers in youtube prompted them to compare with the sermons of our local pastors and find it less convincing. It would weaken the Church.

At the end, the most serious issue we need to understand is that this pandemic has called for a paradigm shift in theological thinking. An attitude and function of Christian ministry will no longer remain the same. If what we call 'social distancing' exists in the world it is not possible for us to think of normal programs like regular classes and worships, seminars and conferences. We know we will continue to organize programs but with a difference. For example, if in a flight, the middle seat is not sold but only aisle and window in the name of social distancing and yet the

cost would be covered from those two seats. As a result, the economy of the middle classes would be seriously hampered. If you will have to fly to another city in India or abroad for very important meetings for two days and yet you will have to be quarantined for 14 days, there and on return to our own state if you are to be again quarantined for another 14 days. In which case, for 2 days program you will have to spend 32/34 days including journey. And if you are in an institution, a quarter of a semester will be gone to 2 days program. This is not going to be acceptable.

Why we need to talk about paradigm shift is because our experiences of combating Covid-19 have not given a good perspective. I am happy with the progress in medical sciences and a hospital in Rome claiming to have developed drugs to deal with it. Similarly, we hear progress reports from America, Israel, India and others as well. I salute to their determination and effort. But few local concerns are equally important for us to shape our perspective. When our nation started facing this pandemic we experienced tremendous response. For example, the donations made by Mukesh Ambani, Ratan Tata, Indian Railways, BCCI, CBSE, Banks, other corporates and Indian celebrities and sportspersons to the Prime Minister's Cares Fund and many others towards Chief Minister's Relief Fund were very encouraging.¹ We see overflowing of Indian wealth for humanity. But after the 2nd phase of the so called national lockdown when the media reporters started reporting ground realities of the concentration camps of migrants who bitterly reported that they were never taken care; food not supplied and they were not allowed to go out to buy food stuff² we are made to think differently. As I have mentioned above that the states have lost huge revenues. But taking Covid-19 pandemic as advantage and cessed

This pandemic has become the most destructive and harmful and expensive. The issue is not for a season or a year. But it would make long lasting impact to our worldview. However, while thinking of theological perspective I realize that non-biblical concept and practice has been seriously questioned. There are people who think that for any sickness we do not need to go to the doctor but only pray for healing. They have all these years undermined divine image in the profession of medical fraternity. Practically speaking, the world spends thousands of

millions of dollars every year in medical sciences; there are thousands of medical scientists who invest years of research on human physical behaviours and develop methods of diagnosis and treatment and the radical and fundamental Christians simply ignoring that they are of no use is not acceptable. That is not all about religiosity of Christianity but making Christianity a blasphemy. Today, we are made to change our theological perspective to human sickness and this pandemic has sharpened our outlook.

It is a fact that, it creates uncertainty of time and schedules but it does not devalue education. We are encouraged to see things inclusively and understand realistically. Covid-19 is considered as severely destructive but this may not be the end of virus. We should be sensitive to tackle with virus. This Covid-19 kills only the body but it can never kill a soul and thus this virus is not a final destruction.

Amen.

(Footnotes)

¹ <https://www.indiatvnews.com/news/india/pm-cares-fund-coronavirus-donation-list-ram-nath-kovind-cbse-bcci-cbse-akshay-kumar-sachin-tendulkar-covid-19-602654>; <https://english.jagran.com/india/coronavirus-outbreak-from-rs-500-crore-by-tata-to-rs-1-lakh-by-ms-dhoni-complete-list-of-contributors-in-fight-against-covid19-10010156/> accessed on May 7, 2020 at 19:05; <https://www.outlookindia.com/website/story/sports-news-list-of-donations-made-by-indian-sportspersons-organisations-towards-pm-cares-fund-to-fight-coronavirus-pandemic/349882/> accessed on May 7, 2020. Cf. <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/donations-pour-in-for-covid-19-fund/article31222311.ece/> accessed on May 7, 2020 at 19:09

² <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K-51rP9drwU> viewed on April 30, 2020

Covid-19 Relief work

as reported by Mr Phungreiso Varu, Regional Communication Officer, CASA-Guwahati and Mr Kaikiri Terang, Project Coordinator, CBCNEI-Guwahati

CBCNEI in association with the local community through the financial support from Church Auxiliary for Social Action (CASA) and Baptist world Alliance (BWA) extended humanitarian relief to 700 families who are victims of Covid-19 crisis in 15 rural villages in five blocks of Goalpara District, Assam. The primary beneficiaries are widows, single women headed families, physical challenge, daily labors, stranded migrants and the most marginalized families. CBCNEI was able to arranged 7000 kgs of rice, 700 kgs of daal, salt, cooking oil, detergent powder, soap, phenyl, sanitary napkins, hand sanitizer and face mask. On May 1-3 2020, the ration kits were distributed to 700 families in 15 villages of Goalpara district of Assam. The primary are widows, single women headed families, physically challenged households, daily laborers, migrant workers who managed to reach homes and other most



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marginalized families. The items distributed to each family are; Rice – 10 kg; Pulses – 1 kg; Mustard Oil – 1 litre; Salt – half a kg; Sanitary napkins – 1 packet; Face Mask – 1; Hygiene Kit containing a soap, detergent powder, phenyle and a 100 ml hand sanitizer. While distributing, we make sure that not only distributing the relief materials but also contribute to the prevention of Coronavirus pandemic in the villages through creating awareness to protect their health and maintain safe social distancing practices. In that way, we also strengthen the capacity of the community and empower them to respond to the pandemic with hope and dignity.



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*Edited and published by CBCNEI,
Panbazar, Guwahati, Assam - 781001,
India*

The Baptist News

The Baptist News is non-profit publication of the Council of Baptist Churches in Northeast India. It is published quarterly.

Disclaimer:

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