

FTESEA OFFICERS VISIT YUSHAN

Canon Peter Ng, the Chair and Dr. H.S Wilson, Executive Director of FTESEA, paid a brief visit to Yushan Theological College & Seminary (YTCS) to review and discuss the development of Ecumenical and Academic Exchange Program (EAEP), a project supported by FTESEA, and other related matters in theological education. Their visit on 29-30 September, Dr. Pusin Tali, the President of YTCS, said “gave much moral encouragement to Yushan community as we are hosting EAEP for four ATU member schools.” Apart from inspiring message and felicitation in the morning chapel, the two FTESEA leaders had a fruitful meeting with the President, faculty and Th.M students. Dr. Wati Longchar, the coordinator of EAEP, highlighted the progress of the exchange program. He informed that Dr. Kapi M. Ching and two students had been to Myanmar Institute of Theology (MIT), Yangon in July and August and two students at Sabah Theological Seminary (STS), Kota Kinabalu in July. He also informed that the exchange plans with the Union Theological Seminary, Philippines (UTS), STS and MIT have been finalized and the first phase of the activities will be completed by July next year. Since the exchange program with the Lutheran Theological Seminary (LTS), Hong Kong will be implemented in the second phase only, the signing of MoU will be done in an appropriate time this year. Wati further informed that this three-year project, approved by FTESEA and ATU, will give opportunities to 32 faculties and 54 students to expose themselves and learn in different institutions and contexts.

Wati also shared about the new D.Min program rationale finalized by Yushan faculty. The faculty of UTS is studying the rationale for further action. It is expected that this new rationale will strengthen DMin program of both institutions.

Professor and students shared their life changing experiences in the meeting. Dr. Kapi Ching, who has been teaching at Yushan for last the 27 years, said that “This is the first opportunity for me to teach outside of Taiwan and MIT is the first school where I served and taught in English. It looks like is a small step for others, but it is a big step for me and a turning point of my life.” He further said that, “I was able to teach a course on ‘Indigenous Biblical Hermeneutics and Contextual theology in Asia’, a course which MIT never offered earlier. It was an eye opener course for MIT students too.” Ms. Panay Asing, a student to MIT, who opted a course on “Interfaith Dialogue” shared how MIT is engaged in dialogue with majority Buddhist not only in doing theology but also share common platform in many issues that confront Myanmar. She said that “I never imagine myself that I would have a chance to talk and discuss with the Buddhist scholars. I was amazed by their cordial attitude and openness to various issues in the country. It was a very precious moment and experience in my life. I came back challenged on how to present Jesus Christ in a dominant Buddhist context and I continue to ponder upon the complexities of presenting the message of Jesus in multi-faith context in Taiwan and Asia.” Panay further said that “Living at MIT, I could experience not only the complexity of different tribes, their cultures but also social harmony among them. To observe and experience different ethnic communities’ cultures was a great learning experience and eye-opener for me.” Dr. Samuel Ngun Ling, the Principal of MIT who also offered a course, also highly appreciated the contribution of Dr. Kapi Ching and the two students to the life of the MIT community. Pastor Sureng, a student who went to STS, Malaysia said that “Dialoguing and encountering people in the actual life situation widen our experience and knowledge. Learning outside of class rooms was very enriching. We cannot forget the local pastors who warmly welcome us and willing share their testimonies and challenges they encountered in serving the Lord among the indigenous peoples and Muslim dominated context.” Seeing the footprints of exploitation of indigenous people by the British colonial rulers and also continuing exploitation by the rich Chinese, Pastor Sureng said that “he was motivated much and strengthened his commitment, and vision to work in solidarity with other indigenous people in Taiwan and around the world.” All

these life-transforming testimonies affirmed the significance face-to-face longer stay in the academic context, community life and of learning experience outside of classrooms.

During the meeting, many common issues were discussed especially on the importance of theological institutions cooperation for higher theological research in Asia. It was noted that the absence of Theological Education Desk both at WCC and CCA, theological educators in Asia experience a vacuum for sharing and learning new pedagogy, theological ideas, support mechanism and mutual theological exchanges at ecumenical and academic levels. The theological forums like the Congress of Asian Theologians (CATS) and the Program for Theology and Cultures in Asia (PTCA) cannot gather to the needs of “face to face” ecumenical and academic exchange program among theological students and teachers in Asia. This EAEP provides a longer term inter-seminaries `face to face’ learning opportunity not only in class rooms but also in diverse ecumenical and contextual realities. This initiative was noted with high appreciation.

Several members affirmed that EAEP among theological institutions of ATU member schools will promote contextual theological research, mission practice, new theological thinking and debate, and also foster ecumenical consciousness among the students and scholars.

The richness of nurturing ecumenical, inter-seminaries, inter-contextual and inter-cultural Asia-wide theological learning was discussed at length. To evaluate the outcome of the EAEP and to take further steps to strengthen the exchange program, it was suggested to initiate a small conference of participating colleges in the coming year. Representatives from FTESEA and Executive Director of ATU could be invited to share global trends in theological education and support mechanism. It was also suggested that a principal of a seminary who are devoted in training minority church leaders in China to be invited. YTCS was further asked to initiate two projects: (1) A small conference to plan for a writing project on “Indigenous Biblical Hermeneutics”, and (2) A major consultation on Asian indigenous women’s leadership development program to strategize a long-term plan for indigenous women’s leadership development in the church and theological seminaries.

In his concluding remarks, while appreciating FTESEA continued commitment to theological education, Wati said, “We consider that FTESEA is a blessing to global church, Asia and ecumenical movement.”

Reported by
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