

## ASIA REGIONAL ECUMENICAL THEOLOGICAL INSTITUTE

The World Council of Churches program on Ecumenical Formation collaborated in 2024 with the Conference of Churches in Asia (CCA) by planning and organizing together the Regional Ecumenical Theological Institute with the Asian Ecumenical Institute of CCA.

The four-week program took place from 21 July to 17 August 2024 at the Christian Conference of Asia headquarters at Payap University, Chiang Mai, Thailand.



The month-long ecumenical formation training course, focused on ecumenical formation and leadership development of prospective Asian ecumenical and church leaders. The topic of the institute was “Creation Care and Justice: Our Faith Commitment and Collective With-ness”. It aimed to provide a wider ecumenical perspective based on biblical and theological undergirding in Asian contexts, focusing on the role of the churches and ecumenical movements in creation care, and affirming their commitment and strengthened bond of “with-ness” in God’s transformative work in creation. The theme was anchored on the Christian Conference of Asia 15th General Assembly theme “God, In Your Spirit, Renew and Restore Your Creation.”

24 students between the ages of 25 and 35 from all over Asia and Australia including Laos, Myanmar, Timor Leste and West Papua and from several different denominations participated in this ecumenical formation program.

As we were highlighting the interconnectedness between faith and creation care in the context of ecological crisis, the deliberations at the Regional Ecumenical Theological Institute helped the participants learn about eco-justice from deeper biblical theological perspectives, and emerging socio-economic and political contexts in Asia. Several of the participants could also include own perspectives and experiences that they had already collected in their contexts.

Amongst the very diverse faculty, were theologians, biblical scholars, social scientists, ecumenists, peace activists, development practitioners, artists and environmental activists, who facilitated the academic lectures.

An important experience was also for the participants to visit inter-religious centers, and to have dialogues with religious leaders, as well as to interact with ethnic and migrant communities from conflict-affected areas. For many of the participants this was like an eye-opener and enlarged their view and respect towards minority groups and people of other faith. As two participants have been from the Mae La refugee camp, one of nine camps along the Thai-Myanmar border housing refugees from Myanmar, students could learn very concretely what it means to be displaced and living a life as a refugee.

On Sundays participants had each week the possibility to encounter with another Christian denomination. Many had for the first time the opportunity to visit a church of another denomination.

It is a unique opportunity that participants receive during the month-long training program to live, learn, and interact with people from diverse Asian cultures and ecclesial backgrounds, and gain knowledge from some of the best resource persons in different fields.

Many of the participants have clearly stated that their interest in global topics including creation care and justice as well as the ecumenical movement has improved and amplified, so that they are highly interested in joining further programs of this type – on an Asian but also global level.

Next to the intensive Academic program that the participants could follow, the encounter and conviviality at a Regional Ecumenical Theological Institute is not to be underestimated. The participants always benefit a lot from each other; they

learn from each other and enrich each other, and eradicate barriers and prejudices. The cooperation between the Christian Conference of Asia and the WCC program for Ecumenical Formation enabled us to bring contextual theologies into conversation not only in the region but with a global horizon.

On behalf of the World Council of Churches I would like to express my gratefulness to CCAs general secretary Dr Mathews George Chunakara and his team for the very positive collaboration as well as to FTEAP who made this encounter and study program possible thanks to a generous grant.

Benjamin Simon  
Dean, Ecumenical Institute at Bossey and Director,  
WCC-Commission on Ecumenical Education and Formation (EEF)