



Christian Conference of Asia – Webinar Series

Churches in Asia Responding to COVID-19 Crisis

Concept Note

As the novel COVID-19 pandemic sweeps through the world, Asian countries have experienced an exponential rise in COVID-19 infections and deaths. As of 1 May 2020, confirmed cases around the world reached 3,323,935 with 234,471 deaths since the new virus was first detected in Wuhan city, within China's Hubei province in December 2019. Of these, Asia has reported 525,063 total cases, with 18,732 deaths. To 'flatten the curve', the World Health Organisation (WHO) introduced general restrictions and guidelines, which national governments have modified according to their contexts. This includes restrictions on travel, closing of borders, banned or limited public and private gatherings, physical distancing, and lockdowns. Such restrictions have greatly affected the socioeconomic and spiritual lives of people and communities. Despite the fear, anxiety, and suffering that has gripped the world, stories of solidarity have also emerged in parallel. Health workers have displayed incredible commitment to their communities and have responded with compassion and resolve to combat the virus, even amidst challenging and sometimes dangerous conditions.

Churches around the world have stepped up in service of vulnerable people and communities, and have offered their support to those in need of it. Expressions of solidarity have become more striking, evident in the sharing of resources, information, expertise, and medical care.

Churches in different Asian countries and regions are now actively engaged in combatting the spread of the virus and are providing medical assistance to the infected people. Local congregations in many places are directly engaged in extending support to those who are quarantined and those who have lost their livelihood due to community lockdowns and restrictions on movement.

It is heartening to note that churches and related organisations in different places in Asia are wholeheartedly collaborating with local governments and civil society organisations in providing basic necessities (medical masks, sanitizers, soap, food and water) to those undergoing treatment and those under quarantine during the period of physical distancing and lockdown. Hospitals and medical clinics belong to churches are providing special medical assistance to COVID-19 patients, and are also making available personal protective equipment (PPE) for medical staff and virus testing kits to state and provincial government hospitals and medical centres in different Asian countries.

The gravity and magnitude of this unprecedented global crisis has proved that such pandemics are no longer limited only to densely populated poor countries, or that they would never become a problem in wealthy countries. Unsustainable lifestyles in the modern era which entail the destruction of the planet and God's creation exacerbate such pandemics, and as new viruses and diseases emerge and spread to every corner of the planet, the faults of such socio-economic structures are exposed. It is clear now that so-called higher levels of living standards with apparently well-developed health care systems are inadequate and leave large numbers of vulnerable people at a greater disadvantage.

The care for all God's creation in God's *oikos* is integrally linked to the survival and well-being of all creation. This reminds us of the role of the Church as a caring community which exists to provide love and support to people who are struggling with life's challenges.

The Christian Conference of Asia (CCA) has encouraged its member churches and councils to observe Asia Sunday 2020 on the theme, "God Heal Us, as We are Vulnerable" as a response to the COVID-19 pandemic and pray for health, recovery, and healing of all those who are suffering from illness and at times of vulnerability.

The CCA discerns the importance of churches sharing challenges, responses, and learnings gleaned while being engaged in responding to COVID-19. A series of conversations through webinars and online discussion sessions are planned by the CCA to create a platform for churches and related diaconal organisations to share experiences from their respective contexts on how churches in Asia are responding to this pandemic.

The second in this series of webinars will be focused on the theme, '**Churches in Asia Responding to COVID-19 Crisis**'.

Objectives

- To provide a platform for churches in Asia for sharing and learning from each other's experiences of addressing the crises of COVID-19.
- To be informed of how churches in the different countries and regions in Asia are serving their communities, in dealing with and responding to the pandemic.
- To help the churches in Asia to nurture spiritual, biblical, and theological reflections and disseminate resources helpful to dispel misleading biblical and theological interpretations in context of the COVID- 19 Pandemic.
- To encourage and motivate the churches in Asia, and help them to share a message of hope, solidarity, and accompaniment in context of the COVID-19 Pandemic in local communities.

Methodology

- The panellists will be invited to share good practices from their local situations and experiences.
- They will share specific examples on how they have been accompanying their communities to deal with and respond to the pandemic.
- Each panellist will be given 5 minutes initially to present how their constituency is dealing with and responding to the pandemic, and how they are accompanying their communities.
- In the second round, specific questions will be posed to each resource person based on the first part of their sharing. Resource persons will be given a maximum of 3 minutes each for their responses.
- In the third round, the panellists will be asked to share good practices in working together with other faith-based organisations, governmental, and non-governmental organisations in providing support as part of their diaconal mission.

- In the fourth round, panellists will be asked to share experiences in catering to the spiritual needs of church members, especially in providing pastoral care under lockdown, where strict measures have been taken by governments and authorities in especially restricting the movement of people.
- Panellists will be identified and selected from CCA member churches, councils and related organisations. The CCA General Secretary will moderate the session and start with an introduction.
- Registered participants of the webinar will have opportunities to raise questions and/or share experiences.
- The webinar can accommodate a maximum of 50 participants, including the panellists and CCA staff.
- Guidelines for participation will be communicated to all registered participants, so that the use of time and technology can be meaningful and optimised.
- A news release announcing the details of the webinar will be widely publicised. A summary report of the webinar and a news release will be shared after the webinar.

Panellists

The following persons are the panellists and will address different perspectives.

1. **Archbishop Willem T.P. Simarmata**
Moderator of CCA
2. **Archbishop Sebouh Sarkissian**
Armenian Apostolic Church in Iran
3. **Metropolitan Dr Yakob Mar Irenaios**
President of Churches' Auxiliary for Social Action (CASA) in India
4. **Fr. William (Bill) LaRousse**
Deputy General Secretary of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conference (FABC)
5. **Bishop Reuel Norman Marigza**
General Secretary of National Council of Churches in the Philippines
6. **Bishop Leo Paul**
Bishop of Church of Pakistan
7. **Rev. Jacky Manuputty**
General Secretary of the Communion of Churches in Indonesia (CCI/PGI)
8. **Prof. Dr Sawako Fujiwara**
Lutheran Theological Seminary and Rikkyo University in Tokyo, Japan

Moderator: Dr Mathews George Chunakara, CCA General Secretary