

ACTION FOR LIFE 2 NEWSLETTER #20

26 April 2004

Tainan, Taiwan

The days have simply whisked by as AFL got into action in Taiwan beginning of April. With most people on bicycles, some on scooters, we create quite a stir as we cycle to our meeting places, when it is not too far. 15 of us are pretty hard to miss!

Zooming between cities, villages, sea-side and mountains, we discover Taiwan's outstanding temples, with 20-30m high Buddha statues, experience the wildness of city traffic and avalanche of adverts on tall buildings, enjoy the peace of rural life-style and the beauty of hundreds of fireflies twinkling in the darkness. We meet individuals who through their commitment and passion help communities regain their splendour after the tragic earthquake in 1999, students of Community college (adults who come for new skills and knowledge, not a degree) who fight with big companies against water pollution, mothers who experiencing a change in their life help other families build stronger relations. Surely our experiences here are rich and varied.

One of our highlights here was interacting with five French Catholic monks of the congregation of St John. Staying with them was a lesson in community in the way they looked after us and took an interest in our lives and the spirit they created there.

It was a time of peace, reflection and rest leading up to the Palm Sunday procession through the village and Easter celebration. That midnight mass with the baptism of a young Taiwanese man brought new understanding of Christianity for some of us and deepening of faith for others. Some time later we were able to watch the new Mel Gibson film "The Passion of the Christ" and see the gruelling last twelve hours of Christ's life. It is a moving and challenging portrayal of the love of one man for all humanity, also showing the deep human suffering. It was a time for all of us to reflect on what our faith and relationship to God means to each of us personally. We owe a debt of friendship and gratitude to the brothers.

"The intrepid explorers of the Taiwan AFL team face the challenges of returning to school for a battle with a group of 13 year olds discovering the voice in their hearts." The 5-day mission to Yan-Ping Junior High School started with a greeting from the school ambassadors and a performance in the full school assembly. Lunch in small groups was the next challenge, some with translation and some without, followed by a 2-hour presentation about AFL and IC. For the next four days we had the opportunity to follow up with the same class through sharing morning quiet time. Again the challenges came raining in with language barriers and getting the students to open up. Nevertheless, the feedback from students was very positive with most enjoying listening to their hearts and many wishing to continue to listen to the voice within, showing a job well done.

One of our main objectives in Taiwan is to reach out to university students. Hearing students share their personal lives in small groups and relating our own experiences helped us to connect on a deeper level. During one presentation Keith Last (AFL) shared about the journey of repairing his relationship with his brother and father. As soon as he had finished sharing one of the students requested to speak. He talked about his family. He could not bear but to express his deep pain and his eyes were filled with tears. Within these weeks we've been able to build a good relationship

"What is love?" sounds pretty easy? But, that was the challenge that was thrown at us by a Buddhist monk in the midst of the mountains of Nantshau county. It gave a meaning to our course on 'Learning to love yourself' (conducted by Ren-Jou Liu, every Tuesday) by trying to find an answer to "Who am I?" The course has been an emotional outburst by raking up our past lives and sending new message to our inner children who need to be adored. Have you ever tried to discover your inner child? Do it now!!

with the students. We are grateful for the hearts that have been touched and pray that we are led to the right people.

The Taiwan MRA/IC team is an inspiration for all of us. Commitment, organization and hard work probably give you a very simple description of what we found here. The Action for Life participants blended smoothly into this group. Their love and dedication is reflected in the way that each small detail has been taken care of. At our arrival each of us was handed a full package of all possible information about Taiwan, including a complete guide with our program, contact list, introduction to MRA Taiwan Team, songs and places to eat. We congratulate Sarah and Han-ting, a new active entrant of AFL in Taiwan, who controls the show behind the scene, for the information they provided us.

Regular story-sharing with some of the local MRA/IC team is inspirational; many of them have been an active part of the team for more than 20 years. Among some of the secrets of their success as a team we found the following:

1. Good teamwork of committed people. That includes regular meetings, shared responsibility and inclusiveness in decision-making. Taiwan is very good not only at manufacturing, but also at producing chairmen in their MRA team.
2. Full-time MRA workers, supported by the whole team. Even if 1 or 2 are available for 1-5 years, they make a difference.
3. Regular newsletters to keep all in the team informed and ensure transparency, but also to connect with the 'world outside'.

The team has a clear vision and that clearness engages people to follow. We feel truly blessed to be here.

With warmest wishes from Tainan,
Zoryana, Shabeen, Liliana, Hsiao-Yun, Christina, Pilar, Nigel, Jisun, Kofi, Han-Ting, Sarah, Keith, Grace, Ren-Jou, and Julie.

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