

ACTION FOR LIFE 2 NEWSLETTER #23

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Taiwan & Korea

Dateline Taipei. As you read this, Taiwan will be staging the inauguration of a President after the most closely run election of modern times. Whether Taiwan should move towards independence or maintain the status quo with China is the big question, and who to trust is the crucial issue.

In spite of political insecurities the friendship of the Taiwanese people never falters. We of the East Asia group of Action for Life, are now two thirds through our journey around this amazing island.

Hsiao-Yun: The last program in Tainan was a six hour workshop in Second Senior High School with 86 students who have secured university places. Our topics were, Who am I? Do I like my present self? How does my family influence me? and, What can I do now? Shared experiences moved into creative discussions on future choices and motivation. Responses posted on our website showed their delight at this chance to think about these questions for the first time and have people really listen to what they were saying.

From Korea: After miraculously obtaining visas, Nigel, Liliana, Jisun and Kofi left humid Tainan to cool down in the chilly spring weather of Korea. We were warmly welcomed by the super-organised group in Seoul, the busy city of 12 million, where people never seem to sleep.

This first week has seen us interacting with youth groups and individuals in the universities. The highlight was a meeting with Venerable Mother Park Chung-Soo, a Won Buddhist nun. Her work has taken her to 53 countries, helping to build schools, hospitals and establish orphanages. We learned that unconditional LOVE is what keeps her going. She says: "My mind is full of plans and struggles how to help others. I have no space to hate or think of evil things. When I see people suffering and I can do something to help, I have to take action or I cannot rest". For her love is all about service. For Kofi the puzzle of love is all coming together: love the Lord, love yourself, and make your life of service to others.

Saying good-bye to the Korea group, ten of us headed east to visit the aboriginal Bunun tribe in the mountainous Taitung area.. We saw how one man's dream to help his people, came true. Twenty years ago, a community centre was begun to train their young people in jobs and skills as a way out of the cycle of drugs and alcohol. Today hand-made clothes and bags are produced for sale, and it has become a venue for conferences and for those studying aboriginal culture. We were treated to a performance of traditional dancing and singing, and a free dip in their natural hot spring baths.

Peter: Following a lush green inland valley northwards, the coastal city of Hualien was our next stop. Ten Thousand Lotus Blossoms of the Heart is the message of a Buddhist relief organisation, the Tzu Chi Foundation, which sent volunteers to build homes for ravaged communities in China after the great flood of 1991. A young Buddhist nun, inspired by meeting three Catholic sisters, established a charity "to help the poor and educate the rich", in 1966. Today, the Tzu Chi Foundation has a 900 bed hospital, a seven storey Temple and a University, on a mid-city Campus. Sharing our experiences with both students, lecturers and co-ordinators there, we found a common bond of concern and compassion. Again, Love for others was the watchword, and to find its expression in a small nation selflessly taking on the needs of the world was truly uplifting.

Keith: Dr Lin Fu-Yueh, Associate Professor of Ethnic Studies had us meet his students at Dong Hwa University, most of them from indigenous tribes. It was an energizing experience. Sharing the message of AfL and IC with personal stories, we managed to keep an informal atmosphere despite the formal surroundings (the room was set up for a board meeting). The students were lively and very willing to listen, "How come you get together and do such powerful things?" said one, sharing the desire to let go of hate and prejudice for the good of their tribes and the world. I was struck by the way they celebrated their differences - one of the girls shared her specialness, being the only person in the University from her tribe. A cultural programme in the evening and the encouragement to us all to participate created a warm environment of togetherness ending a truly fantastic day.

Julie: Staying at the Catholic hostel in Hualien was a joy to me. I attended daily masses and times of adoration in the chapel. Meeting Archbishop Matthew Chia, 80 years old but very bright, I introduced him to AfL. He told us his maxim for life: "Total surrender, real love, and constant joy. As soon as my alarm goes, I get out of bed and on my knees pray for joy so that I can give it to every one I meet. You can't give joy if you don't have it."

Christina: God surprised me by allowing me to attend my cousin's wedding in the USA, in April. I had not been back for almost 10 years and it was wonderful to reconnect with my American family. I also visited the IC team in Washington and took part in a discussion on the possibility of an AfL course there next year, to capture the heart of that great nation.

Sarah: Arriving in Taiwan's capital, our first evening was spent with the MRA Sing Out team at the National Taiwan Normal University. Visits to other Universities followed. A few days later, it made a change for us to dress up to meet Jack and Shelley Huang and friends at an up-market hotel. We were treated to an afternoon tea (read: lunch and dinner in one), over which Jack shared his 'life lessons'. Knowing that time with Jack, a corporate lawyer, really is money, we felt honoured to hear him talk candidly about his experience of trying to live out MRA values. While he acknowledged that staying true to your beliefs is a difficult choice, he talked of the respect, trust and influence he has earned due to his integrity as a lawyer. He encouraged us to accept our shortcomings and keep moving forward, stressing that life is a continual process of change.

Glenys: With spectacular views of Taipei from the 46th floor of a tower block, AfL joined Dr Daniel Lew and his friends of the Liang Zhi (Inner Voice Education). Each of us shared our experience of the liberating power of the inner voice. History Professor Dr Peter Wong, said Dr Lew had been his Professor and had taught him how to listen. Jane Lee, a University student, had learnt it at a Catholic School and it had transformed the relationship with her mother; "Now we have no secrets," she said. A teacher told of children as young as three, sharing inspiring thoughts. Dr Lew, a dynamic 91 year old, who holds these tea parties each month, shared his life with us, including his years as Consul General in New Zealand.

Shabeen: A deepening of my faith has been the best part of what I have learnt from AfL. Last week I was struggling for balance between my inner and outer self. Eventually, this stimulated me to get connected to Allah. I try to be His instrument and feel His presence in each and every step I take. I am prepared to go back to Kashmir, for Allah has a plan for me, Inshallah (God willing).

Good wishes from Shabeen (India), Ren-Jou and Grace, Hsaio-Yun, Han-Ting (Taiwan), Christina (Australia), Keith (England), Zoriana (Ukraine), Julie (Malaysia), Sarah, Peter and Glenys (NZ).