

Link Letter No.65 June 2014

Dear friends,

Excess and greed

Excess is the new normal. So normal, in fact, that we don't notice it any more. Until something happens, that is! Like the two-metre long wardrobe rail collapsing under the weight of the clothes hanging on it. That happened to me last week. Then I knew. Sure I could claim that half the clothes are T-shirts from local churches and schools with their logos on. But hey, excess is excess, and when the wardrobe rail collapses, then the time has come to face reality. Enough is enough. Excess has become the new normal. Too much of a good thing indeed!

In Taiwan, an excess of bad things in life is attributed to fate, while having more than I need of something good (according, of course, to my definition of "good", which clearly includes T-shirts) is a sign that things are going well, a sign of blessing. Sometimes our wants become our needs, and before we know it, we've lost all sense of proportion – and the wardrobe rail collapses in protest; as Gandhi said: *"Earth provides enough to satisfy every man's needs but not every man's greed."* No wonder three of the deadly sins (greed, lust and gluttony) are classified as sins of excess. No wonder the psalms are full of references to our lives being but a breath, *"bustling about, but only in vain; heaping up wealth [and T-shirts], not knowing who will get it"*. Ah, no wonder the world's in such a mess!

Excess is everywhere. Unlimited internet access 24/7 means our young people in Taiwan

spend much of their free time online, sadly neglecting real friends, studies and health. Obesity is hitting them big-time. The boys walking past my house every day from the dormitories to their classes are getting fatter and fatter, year by year. After all, that's the only exercise they may get all day, all five minutes of it. Many of them already look like middle-aged men, beer belly 'n all.

Fortunately not all is lost, and I notice that obesity among the girls is virtually non-existent, and also among boys studying subjects where many in the class are girls. Is that a coincidence, or



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The Sunflower Movement - see text overleaf



The Sunflower Movement protests

in recent months, many of which could be attributed, some might say, to those three deadly sins of excess, including a selfish desire by the business community for more material wealth and somewhat underhand ways of obtaining it. Such actions did not go unnoticed among the general public, and while many may have wished it could have been otherwise, the rise of *The Sunflower Movement* protest led to the occupation of the legislature (for the first time in history) from March 18-April 10. They were protesting the passing of the Cross-Strait Service Trade Agreement (CSSTA) by the government without clause-by-clause review.

The question is, will opening up the trade and service economy with Mainland China boost Taiwan's economy, as claimed by the government, or will it have the opposite effect, resulting in Taiwan's many small and medium-sized businesses facing unfair competition and so being forced to close? Many are asking will the rich just get richer, while the rest of us struggle to even keep hold of what little we have?

Christian affiliation in Taiwan is strongly linked to ethnicity, and ethnicity is strongly linked to politics. The Sunflower Movement received open support from some churches; others were far more careful and stood back, watching from the sidelines and offering individual support. I went down to the Legislature to check out what was going on and was amazed at how orderly the protest camp was, how welcoming all the protesters were, and how safe it all seemed to be (*the photos in this link letter were all taken on that visit*). Amazingly, and despite some violence, nobody was killed and the whole 23-day protest ended peacefully.

Protests galore...

But the protest lifted the lid on a whole powder keg and was soon replaced by other protests, including a major one against the construction of Taiwan's fourth nuclear power station. Given Taiwan's proximity to Japan and with the tragedy of Fukushima still fresh in everyone's minds, Taiwan is perhaps not the safest place in the world to build nuclear power stations (what place is?!). The government's argument is, of course, that Taiwan needs nuclear energy, but at what risk to

cause and effect? Either way, I just wish we had more girls studying engineering!

But excessive time spent on violent online games is thought to be strongly linked with the knife attack that tragically took place last week on the Taipei Metro, resulting in the deaths of four people, with critical injuries to many more. This is the first ever such attack in Taiwan, and has led to much soul searching ever since.

The Sunflower Movement

It is one of many major events that have rocked Taiwan



The Sunflower Movement protests

safety? People are wary; after all, if the Japanese cannot trust their government and their assurances of safe nuclear power, then can we really trust ours?

In the middle of all this, on April 29, Taiwan's Ministry of Justice suddenly ordered the execution of five people on death row; many questioned the timing, not to mention the legitimacy, of the cases and the human rights of those killed, since none of their families or lawyers were informed in advance. Oh how Taiwan certainly needs much prayer at this time!



The Legislature main entrance



Bishops from left are from Osaka, Taiwan and (the Archbishop) Hong Kong

And the good news? Well, free speech and the right to peaceful protest is the mark of a democratic country, and Taiwan certainly put it to the test these last few months!

The Taiwan Episcopal Church is happily celebrating 60 years of mission in Taiwan this year with all sorts of celebrations, thanking God for His many blessings. We had a big celebration day on Saturday, April 26

Word on the street...

Meanwhile down at street level, ordinary people get on with making a living, rolling their eyes at government excesses and worrying only whether they can get to work safely and make a decent living to take care of their families. But on the same day last week as the knife attack on the Taipei Metro, there was also an earthquake of 5.9 that shook everyone up in the morning, the strongest of the year so far. On top of this, more rain (357 mm) fell in Taipei that day than normally does for the whole month (the average for May is 295.7 mm), thereby classifying itself as "extreme torrential rainfall". Not surprisingly, people are worried.



The Taiwan Episcopal Church 60th anniversary celebrations

with about 750 people, including a group of 30 from our companion diocese of Osaka, plus the archbishop of Hong Kong and representatives from the Episcopal Church in the USA.

And we are looking forward to welcoming 200+ bishops and spouses from the Episcopal Church during September for their House of Bishops meeting, with outings planned for them to visit some of our churches and, of course, to see something of this beautiful country.

And then in October I hope to be back in the UK on home leave until April of next year – see y'all then!

Other news

Check out my blog for all up-to-date news. You'll see I was in Malaysia in March for the launch of AsiaCMS, then mountain climbing in April and back in

time for our Holy Week and Easter celebrations, and then to the USA in May to accompany a group to visit our sister kindergarten there, plus many activities in-between, including the construction of our new church centre. The blog statistics show which countries people are checking in from and it's fascinating to see which posts attract people from which countries. Other countries are fairly consistent, but the UK comes into a category all of its own, I have yet to fathom you guys out, honest!

The greatest good news?

Of course – that we have a God who loves us to excess, so much so in fact that He sent His only son, Jesus to be our Lord and Saviour, great news eh? When it comes to God's love, excess is never too much!

With love to you all,

Catherine



The logo for our 60th anniversary of the Taiwan Episcopal Church

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