

Catherine Lee

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The call in action

Greetings from Taiwan to you all!

Thank you for your concern and prayers in this pandemic. I too have been praying for you all and I've appreciated the online worship offered by many CMS link churches.

Rollercoasters are my worst nightmare and always have been. Interestingly, our collective experience in Taiwan of COVID-19 is well summed up by a cartoon in the local media of a Taiwanese man standing outside a COVID-19 theme park watching a rollercoaster lurching up and down, round and round. In each of the five cars of the rollercoaster train sits a grim-faced, well-known world leader, with the name of their country – USA, UK, France, China, Japan (in that order) – on the outside of their car. It says it all. Often it's Taiwan on the rollercoaster, with the world watching us struggling to cope with yet another natural disaster. This time, it's us watching the world and its leaders in crisis.

Thankfully, the Taiwanese government learned lessons from the 2003 SARS epidemic and has been proactive and vigilant from the very first World Health Organization (WHO) coronavirus report on 31 December 2019. After an initial few weeks of collective anxiety and fear, the public has fast adapted to face-masks, temperature checks, bans on large gatherings, travel restrictions etc.. Starting 19 March, all borders were closed except to citizens and residents, and everyone admitted to the country subject to a closely-monitored 14-day quarantine, which still applies. It's working so far. And all this, without Taiwan even being allowed to join the WHO. How's that for further collective isolation?

Taiwan's population is 23 million, and contrary to initial dire predictions, to date we have had just 446 confirmed cases, seven deaths. It could have been so much worse. With no widespread community transmission, there has been no lockdown, and after a two-week delay at the start of the new term, schools, work and church services have continued more or less as normal. On 20 May, President Tsai Ing-wen was sworn in for her second term. Her vice president is trained as a medical doctor. This helps the government to maintain the support of the people; in fact, the health minister has become something of a media star with his dedicated daily press briefings!

Just before the pandemic worsened worldwide, and days before Taiwan announced a ban on large gatherings, the consecration of our new bishop, Lennon Yuan-Rung Chang went ahead as planned on 22 February. The chief consecrator was Presiding Bishop Michael Curry, and the service was attended by 14 bishops, a congregation of 400, and many more watching online. Please do pray for our new bishop and the challenges he faces, not least here at St John's University where he is now also chair of the board.

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Name: Catherine Lee

Location: Taiwan

My call: To serve, share, and support the ministry of the Church in Taiwan.

My role: Working with the Taiwan Episcopal Church, based at St John's University, Taipei, I support the church, chaplaincy and kindergarten ministry of the Diocese of Taiwan.



Me with Presiding Bishop Michael Curry

In the rollercoaster cartoon mentioned above, Taiwan is watching from the sidelines. In reality, Taiwan is far from idly standing by, and has been sending face masks around the world by the million, coming to the rescue of many countries lacking basic protective equipment. Even I've been sending "Made-in-Taiwan" face masks to my family in the UK – if you want some too, just let me know!

Taiwan's success in fighting COVID-19 has been the basis of the government's concerted efforts to join the WHO, and has gained the support of many countries worldwide. However, combined with the reelection of President Tsai and her support for the Hong Kong protests, such actions have not been welcomed by the government in Mainland China, and with world powers looking to distract from their own failings, so the skies and seas around Taiwan are seeing increased military activity. Black Lives Matter protests have also been widely covered in Taiwan's media. As the Diocese of Taiwan is part of the US-based Episcopal Church and the Anglican Communion, so we have much to reflect on. The Episcopal Church is facing head-on its 400-year legacy of supporting slavery, but let's face it, it all started under the British government, and of course the dear old Church of England. God have mercy upon us all.

With that as background, sadly we need to face the reality that so many of our Taiwan Episcopal Church members over the years have moved to the USA but don't feel welcome to join Episcopal churches there, so most join Chinese churches of other denominations. Same in the UK and elsewhere. And secondly, we have some work to do here in Taiwan. Many people in Taiwan are ignorant about racism; comments many people would consider offensive are often not considered offensive here, and even racist memes are seen as acceptable, "because we don't have this problem in Taiwan". Racial discrimination and prejudice based on skin tone is illegal in Taiwan, but is widespread when hiring English teachers, for example, and especially against South East Asians. The challenges are many, the road ahead is long.

As we remember William Wilberforce, leader of the abolitionists and a founder of the Church Mission Society, so we are challenged as to what being a mission society in today's world is all about. Where the British Empire and slave trade went, so followed the Anglican Church, and whether intentional or not, also the concept of white privilege. Its legacy, sadly, continues to be something many of us mission partners have to deal with on a daily basis. We need God's grace and wisdom. Please join us in prayer. Thank you!

Catherine

Photos from top to bottom: 14 bishops in action at Bishop Lennon Yuan-Rung Chang's Consecration on 22 February, 2020; me with Bishop Chang and his wife Hannah; Harry Potter to the Rescue! Movie characters fancy dress SJU Student Fellowship farewell party for graduating students, June 2020; SJU chaplaincy team 2020 modelling our new SJU Student Fellowship t-shirts, designed by Yi-Ting (student fellowship leader on the left).



GOING FURTHER WITH CHURCH MISSION SOCIETY

Mission Unscripted: How are CMS people in mission responding to COVID-19? Some are working harder than ever at what they were already doing, others are turning their hand to something different! Go to churchmissionsociety.org/mission-unscripted

If you would like to discuss your mailings with us or to receive this link letter on a regular basis, please email supporter.care@churchmissionsociety.org or call 01865 787400

You can give to Catherine at: churchmissionsociety.org/catherinelee

Contact details:

Email: catherinelee234@yahoo.com

Blog: <https://catherinelee234.com>

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