



# Catherine Lee

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**Location:** Taiwan



**What I do:** Working with the Taiwan Episcopal Church, supporting the church and kindergarten ministry of the Diocese of Taiwan



**Equipping and encouraging** where followers of Jesus are in a minority

New Year greetings to you all!

It's 6.00 am, the first light of dawn, and the door of the Buddhist temple swings open to let out two young barefoot monks in bright orange robes. They walk silently in single file towards the market, where they start collecting food from local people, offering blessings in return. It's a common sight; this early morning almsgiving is a daily ritual. But this is not Taiwan. It's mid-October, and I am in Chiang Mai, northern Thailand, for a CMS conference. Thai schools are on holiday for four weeks, and I learn that boys often serve two weeks of their holidays as monks to earn merit for their parents. It's certainly a colourful sight first thing in the morning, as I walk around the area working up an appetite for all the delicious Thai food I'll be eating during the coming day.



*All in blue at the CMS conference*

We are staying at The Juniper Tree guest house. Its name is inspired by the story of Elijah, who, after fleeing from Queen Jezebel, sat down under a juniper (broom) tree for rest and refreshment to enable him to journey onwards for the next 40 days. It seems an appropriate picture for us too as a group of 40 CMS UK and Asia-CMS people serving in mission all over Asia, in different countries, cultures and contexts. The last time we had a CMS gathering like this was October 2017 in Cambodia, so we have a lot of catching up to do, with old friends and new. Our themes for the week all start with B: belong, build, become and bridge, though I've made sure we also include balloons, and we've had a day all dressed in blue. Ah, it was fun!

Only a few weeks before the CMS conference, I had spent the weekend in the town of Guangfu, Hualien, on Taiwan's scenic east coast, which had been inundated with mud on 23 September, after days of torrential rain from Typhoon Ragasa. A barrier lake, formed by an earlier landslide in July, overflowed, leading to a "tsunami of thick sludge" which covered Guangfu and some surrounding villages, leading to the deaths of at least 19 people. One of the buildings filled with sludge was the Guangfu Dental Clinic, run by Dr Kuo and his wife, much-loved members of St Luke's Church, Hualien, our only church on the east coast. They've served in Guangfu for the last 42 years and are well-known for kindness and compassion towards their patients, and especially towards the elderly and disadvantaged. Inspired by 1 Corinthians 12:26, "If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honoured, all

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To the edges**



rejoice together”, a team of us went from the Taiwan Episcopal Church for three days to clean out the clinic. There was mud everywhere. It was hard work: smelly, dirty, hot, dusty and totally disgusting.

Dr Kuo and his wife escaped with their lives because they live upstairs above their clinic; most of those killed were elderly people living in one-storey homes further down near the river who couldn't get out in time. In the weeks that followed, thousands of people from all over Taiwan volunteered to join the relief and

clean-up effort; working together, the sense of camaraderie was very moving for everyone to witness. When we asked Dr Kuo's neighbours, a doctor and a pharmacist, about the future, they sighed and said, “We're just taking it one day at a time”. Unknown to us, but filled with faith, Dr Kuo was already planning on reopening his dental clinic, and within a few weeks, he had received gifts of new dental equipment, donated by his dentist friends and charitable organisations. It was great to see him smiling once again, and on Saturday 1 November, we all gathered for a second time at his dental clinic, but this time for a thanksgiving service and grand reopening. I was honoured to be invited by Rev Joseph Wu, vicar of St Luke's Church, to join him in presenting Dr Kuo and his wife with a framed photo of our muddy, dirty, exhausted church group taken on that September weekend, only five weeks previously, a poignant reminder of how far we had come since then. The Guangfu Dental Clinic was one of the first businesses in the town to reopen, and, inspired by their example, the neighbouring doctor's clinic and pharmacy are also reopening. Inundated with mud, then overflowing with compassion, now blessed with reopening; slowly, the town is coming back to life.

Typhoons, mudslides and earthquakes in other areas of Taiwan have made the news since then, along with political crises, both domestic and international, but we continue on in hope and trust that our lives are in God's hands. Indeed, I was reminded of our experience in Guangfu while at the CMS conference, as we shared together at The Juniper Tree, offering support and prayer for those suffering and rejoicing with those celebrating. Like Elijah, we too left there encouraged and strengthened for the journey ahead, wherever God may lead us. Your part in this journey is also very much appreciated; and I thank you for all your support and prayers throughout 2025.

Wishing you all a Happy New Year, with many blessings for 2026!

Catherine Lee



*Photos from top to bottom: Lok Moli temple, Chiang Mai; walking through Guangfu town; a mud-covered team photo at Guangfu Dental Clinic: note the water line on the wall above our heads and the remains of the dental chair in the centre; presentation to Dr and Mrs Kuo at the grand reopening of their dental clinic*



## Equipping where followers of Jesus are in a minority

**I've been encouraged to hear from others** who are part of my wider area of work. In India, growing hostility towards Christians leads church pastors to trek into the hills to meet with and disciple one another. And in the Middle East, women are leading other women from Muslim backgrounds to faith in Jesus. Read more at [churchmissionsociety.org/equip](https://churchmissionsociety.org/equip)

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