

Report from 2010 WSCF Asia Pacific Regional Committee Meeting held in Tomohon, Indonesia

Rosalind Hewett

The 19th Asia Pacific RCM was held July 21-27, in Tomohon, a small town in the mountainous inland region of North Sulawesi, Indonesia. We were fortunate enough to be hosted at a local resort, and so it was only a half-a-minute's walk from our rooms to the area where we met each day. Present were other representatives from Bangladesh, Cambodia, Hong Kong, India, Indonesia, Japan, Korea, Myanmar, Pakistan, the Philippines, Sri Lanka, Taiwan, Thailand and Timor Leste. One participant attended from Malaysia as an observer. Our local hosts were incredibly kind and obliging, and frequently went out of their way to make us feel at home – even bringing the members of the worship committee ice cream on one occasion!

This was personally a very enriching experience for me, although slightly overwhelming at the time! In particular, it was humbling to hear the passion and commitment expressed by delegates from other countries in the Asia Pacific for their national movements. We had an incredible amount of material to cover in a short space of time, and much of it was new. I asked a lot of questions for clarification as there was a lot of information to process, and as the language was quite technical also found myself trying to explain what was meant in simpler English to those sitting around me.

As part of the worship committee, I was involved each day in spending an hour or so preparing for morning worship, and helping to lead. We had no moderator, so decisions were by consensus. Those of us on the committee were passionate about music and singing, so eventually we convinced a few of the local hosts to play guitar for us. We also took very seriously involving everyone both in and outside the committee in some way in worship, whether it was reading a Bible verse (in the individual's own language), praying or planting a seed which, by the end of the RCM, had sprouted and formed a symbol of the growth that we hoped would emerge from the proceedings.

I was also part of an interfaith commission. This included an exposure trip to a community in Manado where Muslims and Christians live peacefully side-by-side, often inter-marrying and attending each others' festivals and services. This was a highlight of the meeting for me, especially when I was able to interview a Muslim woman whose husband led prayers locally, to ask for her opinions on inter-faith dialogue and the position of Muslims, as a minority in Manado, and as a majority in Indonesia. A Bible study we did focused on Jesus' attitude towards a Samaritan woman, whom he helped without judgment although her people were generally despised by Jews at the time and shunned as members of a different 'religion'.

One thing to note is that to a certain extent I felt like an outsider from Australian SCM – while other national movements had many members and limited finances, it seemed that the ASCM was the very opposite, with limited members and relative freedom financially. I felt I could contribute little to discussions on, for example, requesting financial support for national programs from WSCF AP (as ASCM is financially independent, relatively speaking), or to discussions on the limited participation of women in national decision making.

This was the last RCM for Necta Montes, our Regional Secretary, and so with some considerable emotion she read out her last report. One Senior Friend interviewed each delegate to say a few words about Necta and recorded it, and so the very last thing we did at the RCM was watch a collation of those interviews – with some tears shed, as Necta was and is dearly loved by many.

On a personal level, I connected with all of the other delegates, and many of the Senior Friends and local hosts. The room I shared with two participants from Pakistan and the Philippines was one of the few at the resort with hot water; thus, in the evenings, many of the others would come to our room for a shower and then stay for a chat. Even when people did not need a shower they would come to our room just to talk and hang out. We shared many stories, a few tears, laughs, hugs, games, and prayed and connected with each other spiritually – all in a rat- and lizard-infested room! This, more than any of the formalities and proceedings of the meeting, was the highlight of my time at the RCM.