

Dear SCMer

You'll already have seen a few of my ideas arising from last month's meeting in Thailand in my emails on specific topics. Here's a broader overview of what the meeting was about and what I got out of it. I should preface these comments by saying that there will be minutes of the meeting, which will be circulated once Sophia and/or I get them from the AP office.

Overview

The meeting I attended was for all the SCM General Secretaries, National Co-ordinators or other "top level" staff in the Asia-Pacific region. We had representatives from India, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh; Burma, Cambodia, Thailand, Indonesia and Philippines (plus our Regional Women's Co-ordinator who is from Singapore); Korea, Hong Kong and Taiwan (apologies from Japan); Australia and New Zealand. Some sent alternates because their General Secretary was unable to attend.

The stated purposes were:

- To share the situation of national movements
- To search for strategies to empower the national movements
- To strengthen relationship among national movements, regional office and IRO
- To articulate the vision and mission of the SCMs
- To share the current programs of the WSCF-AP

Of these, I think the first, third and fifth were really the primary purposes, and certainly these were the areas that we focused on and were most successful in achieving. We also caught up with Beate and Nana, the Inter-Regional Co-Secretaries General, and the Regional Secretary from the Middle East who are meeting now with Shin (our Regional Secretary) and Thai SCM to plan the General Assembly.

What I have gained from attending

The most important thing for me was renewing my feeling of inspiration and commitment. The sources of these include:

- the realisation that a lot of other movements already rely, as we do, on volunteer or very low-paid staff, whose commitment to "serve the people" (as SCM Philippines puts it) was evident and humbling
- the energy that comes from genuinely sharing one's struggles with others who are similarly struggling, and finding points of inspiration in each other's stories
- discovering in the process that the AP office and the other movements do understand that the ASCM is really struggling (most valiantly and with real grounds for optimism, may I add)
- finding that the AP regional and national staff see the WSCF as a "family", not just a "federation", ie. we not only talked but also lived out a discipleship of brother/sisterhood, and expect to continue doing so from our home countries.

I've also learned various kinds of information, some of which I've already shared by email and other aspects of which will flow out as they become relevant (eg. a clearer understanding about various AP programs and the forthcoming General Assembly). A couple of things are worth expanding on here.

SCMP movement exchange

I came back from Thailand feeling more enthusiastic about the proposal for a member of SCMP to come and work with us in Australia. They have a very strong movement, built on very strong organising principles and a great sense of commitment from their volunteer staff. Obviously Australia is a different situation than the Philippines in many ways, but I'm sure it can be a really valuable learning experience for all involved. Cate Clarke in Adelaide is now in contact directly with Leni, the proposed delegate from SCMP, who is a very experienced member of the volunteer national staff.

Cambodia movement exchange

Cambodia SCM is a brand new movement, which for the last few years has received a lot of AP support (relatively speaking) as it tries to get off the ground. Unfortunately they took a big step backwards when the Kampuchea Council of Churches collapsed last year, so they're starting almost from scratch. Fortunately, they now have an excellent national co-ordinator by the name of Im Thano (family name Im), with whom I spent a lot of time. We spent some time discussing a number of suggestions as to how we could all help.

One is that the AP office should set up an email list for the national co-ordinators to share resources and ideas for Cambodia SCM. I anticipate that we will gain as much or more than we contribute by being an active part of this list. Once it's up and running, I may put out an invitation for interested SCMerS to join if that seems appropriate.

Another is that the existing movements, particularly those with strong English skills, were encouraged to set up a movement exchange to Cambodia. Aotearoa SCM will take the lead on organising this, which will involve an SCMer or young Friend going to Cambodia for 6 months or more and tutoring in English as well as helping to organise SCM activities. We're anticipating that AP will cover the airfare and some of the food and lodging costs, with others being earned through the tutoring. Thano is an English teacher himself and would set up the "school", the income from which would be important for funding SCM programs. The question for us is, does anyone have an interest in being a volunteer, preferably from early next year?

Renewed contact with Aotearoa SCM

At the meeting I met my Aotearoa (NZ) counterpart, Tess Windle, who had also organised the recent Women Doing Theology conference. She's very energetic and a great contact. I look forward to keeping in touch with her, and we'll see whether a

movement exchange (in either or both directions) is possible around national conference time. (Hopefully our common weeks of holidays won't overlap next July.)

General Assembly 2003

This gathering of representatives from every SCM in the world (over 100) will be held, together with our Regional Committee Meeting, in Thailand during late July and early August 2003. The exact dates are to be confirmed, but likely dates (for both events) are 22 July to 17 August. Start thinking NOW about whether you want to attend, and also whether you'd like to serve as staff or a committee members at the regional or inter-regional level. You'll need to understand the structure and issues of WSCF, but there's plenty of time if you start soon. Contact Sophia for more information.

Resources

I've mentioned this already, but I'll say it again: there are a lot of great resources out there that can save us from re-inventing the wheel. The only problem is, without a centralised library in a national office it's been hard for us to access these. A few of us asked, and the AP office happily agreed, that an annotated list of books and other AP resources be circulated. The AP office is quite happy for us to make requests for copies of these resources as the need arises, at minimal or no cost.

Another resource is the AP website, <http://www.wscfap.org>, which includes lots of information about past and future programs, articles from Praxis (the AP newsletter) and links to the websites of the national movements. If you haven't already had a look, I encourage you to do so!

Finally

Greetings to all of you from Shin, Yock Leng, Beate and all the participants – and from me, your re-energised national co-ordinator.

Shawn