

Taiwan: an island of striking beauty and promise, of prosperity and potential - but a domain also of tension, uncertainty, conflicting ideologies and political intrigue. What do you know of Taiwan?

Not long ago seven pilgrims, under the leadership of Rev. Susan Samuel (minister at Knox Presbyterian Church, Kincardine, ON) journeyed to Taiwan - formerly known as Formosa - to meet with leaders and members of the Presbyterian Church in Taiwan (PCT), in order to learn about the ministries and the challenges faced in these days by this our sister denomination.



Pictured are (back row): Tara Samuel-Flugger, Rev. Terry Samuel, Matt Flugger, Diane Osborn, Rev. Susan Samuel, (front row) Chen Hui-Shu (PCT Press), Isobel Culbert, Dave Culbert, Lydia Ma (PCT press).

We visited churches, schools and hospitals, many of which have their roots tied in with the stories of Presbyterian missionaries from Canada and England. We heard many presentations and were warmly and generously welcomed at every stage by principals, doctors, administrators, ministers, elders and many others. In the mountains we visited aboriginal villages, congregations, and dedicated Christian workers.... and were welcomed with warmth, generosity and grace at every turn. Highlights of our tour included time spent with two members of the Presbyterian Church in Canada (PCC) who are living and working in Taiwan: Louise Gamble - teaching in Tamsui, and Rev. Murray Garvin - teaching at Yu Shan Theological Seminary. We were unable to connect with Rev. Paul McLean, who is working with the Hakka people to produce a Bible in their own language.

Rev. Stephen Hsu arranged much of our itinerary; he met us part way through the tour and acted ably and most hospitably as our guide and interpreter. Stephen is Secretary of Ecumenical Relations Committee and also Secretary of the Church Policy/Law Committee for the Presbyterian Church in Taiwan.

On the last day in the General Assembly Office we met with the General Secretary of the Presbyterian Church in Taiwan, Rev. Andrew Chang and others, including Rev.

Sidney Chang - a retired minister in our Canadian church. Sidney is working with the PCT to update their website. The tour concluded with an evening at the opera where we enjoyed a gala presentation of "The Black Bearded Bible Man" - the story of George Leslie MacKay in Taiwan. (MacKay was appointed as missionary to Taiwan by the PCC in 1871)

The Presbyterian Church in Canada has a long and rich history with the people of Taiwan; we were reminded of unique and powerful links that have tied our two churches together since the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. But more than that, we were humbled and inspired by the ways in which the Presbyterian Church in Taiwan has grown into a grace-filled and faithful witness to the gospel in Taiwan. Not only in terms of evangelical outreach, but also in terms of a courageous stance for justice, the PCT is known in Taiwan as a "political" church, meaning that it is ready, when necessary, to take a public stand against oppressive measures and to defend basic human rights. Indeed, some of that courage is being called up even in these days. On November 22<sup>nd</sup>, at a 20,000-strong public rally, Andrew Chang addressed the assembly as reported by Lydia Ma, in the PCT Press:

*"PCT General Secretary Andrew Chang stressed that recent events have led the Taiwanese people to lose faith in the government and the country. Some people are so disappointed that they are ready to use violence to counter violence. If violent opposition and irrationality continue, Taiwan will lose peace and justice. Hence, the PCT called a press conference to urge the Ma administration to deal with unlawful acts by the judiciary, unethical prosecution, and violation of basic human rights. The PCT would like to see the government committed to ensuring the due process and defending people's rights."*

Our tour was initially set up with the help of Lindsay Hepburn in our PCC Toronto offices (Lindsay has responsibility for a number of portfolios, including *Something Extra*; *Profiles of mission staff*; *Mission Interpretation (trips/speakers/projects/education)*; *Deputation of missionaries*).

It turned out to be an enriching and inspirational gift. We came home with a renewed resolution to hold the PCT in our prayers as they face changing and potentially challenging times in weeks and months to come.

The PCT website is a good place to monitor both the challenges and the responses made by the PCT as it bears witness in a country struggling to establish its own identity under a government that, in the words of General Secretary, Andrew Chang, "remind us of the years of martial law in Taiwan". Please check out <http://enews.pctpress.org> and <http://www.pct.org.tw/english/>