

Report
Association of Christian Universities and Colleges in Asia Management Conference 2017
October 19-22, 2017
“Exploring the Relationship of Religion, Culture and Peace in Christian Higher Education”

About 60 ACUCA participants from member institutions joined 15 full-time participants and staff from Payap University in this year's Management Conference at Payap University in Chiang Mai, Thailand. The conference organizers proposed the theme, “Exploring the Relationship of Religion, Culture and Peace in Christian Higher Education,” which is a focus developed in several ways at Payap University. Organization of the conference was undertaken jointly by the ACUCA executive committee, a conference taskforce of Payap University, Payap's Institute for Religion, Culture and Peace (IRCP), and the Christian Communications Institute (CCI) of Payap. Housing for conference participants was arranged at the Empress Hotel and Conference Center in Chiang Mai. The United Board for Christian Higher Education in Asia provided scholarships for 10 participants, and sent three staff members to observe and participate.

As participants arrived, there was a welcome dinner at the hotel on Thursday evening, October 19. The conference theme was introduced right away with performances by the CCI which used Thai cultural forms to convey a warm Christian welcome to participants from Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Philippines, Indonesia and India.

The conference was opened formally with worship in the Henry Luce Chapel on Payap's main campus on Friday morning. Worship services for the conference were led by Dr. Sathanun Boonyakiat, Dean of the McGilvary College of Divinity of Payap University, assisted by musicians from the seminary and the College of Music. Dr. Amnuay Tapingkae, former President of Payap, one of the founders of ACUCA and a former President of the association, brought a homily that reflected on the unique tasks of Christian higher education. Dr. Sompan Wongdee, immediate Past-president of Payap, and President of ACUCA greeted the participants, and then Dr. Rux Prompalit, current president of Payap welcomed everyone.

The conference program continued with a keynote address by Dr. Suchart Setthamalinee, head of Payap University's Department of Peace Studies (PhD program) in which he told movingly of “My Journey to the Road of Violence and Peacebuilding in Islam.” His timely emphasis was on how peace and non-violence are essential to Islam, and how he has found ways to promote those in Thailand.

The morning ended with a change of pace presentation by the Revs Allan and Joan Eubank and performers of the CCI directed by Suchinda Chaiagunsarakorn. Allan told how he had discovered ways to overcome resistance to traditional Thai folk arts, and how, for more than 30 years, Thai Folk Melodrama has been used to tell stories from the Bible. CCI then performed 3 scenes from their rendition of “The Story of the Prodigal Daughter.”

Throughout the afternoon, conference participants attended parallel sessions in which 14 presentations were made on observations and research conclusions about “Christian Higher Education” (how Christians are doing it), and “The Vital Role of Christian Educators in Multi-Religious Societies (mostly about the roles of teachers and chaplains in promoting peace and mutual appreciation). The presentations were followed by short periods of questions and answers and the full papers were printed in the conference “Program and Proceedings” book.

The program on Saturday, October 21, began with a choral service of morning prayers led by the McGilvary College of Divinity choir. Four IRCP reporters then summarized the things they had heard from each of the four parallel sessions so that the salient ideas would be brought to everyone's attention.

After a refreshment break, participants from each country met with their colleagues to decide how to disseminate the values of the conference back in their home universities.

The 2017 conference ended with a report by the Rev. Dr. Esther Wakeman, General Secretary of ACUCA about new member institutions, the Student Mobility Scheme, and plans for the coming ACUCA General Assembly and Student Camp to be held in 2018, a year from now hosted by Christian University of Thailand. A closing worship service was the last formal event of the management conference.

After lunch, many of the delegates took a tour of Chiang Mai before heading back home from the Chiang Mai International Airport.

Note that texts from speakers and presenters will be available on the ACUCA website, as well as albums of pictures taken by conference photographers.
