

# Catherine Lee

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*The call in action*

## Chinese New Year greetings to you all!

It's 5am and dark; the only bright lights are the fishing boats out at sea and the slight sliver of a waning crescent moon high in the sky. There's only two days left before the new moon appears that determines the date of Chinese New Year (CNY) but there's still much to do – cleaning, shopping, cooking – everyone's busy!

It may be 5am, but there's a few of us out on the St. John's University (SJU) sports track, getting in our exercise before the world wakes up. One lady tells me of her memories of CNY when she was a child. She's in her early 50s, one of 12 children, now aged 42-70, and she remembers often seeing snow on the nearby Yangmingshan mountains at CNY. Now there's rarely any snow at all, climate change is real. She also remembers the excitement of receiving red envelopes of money at CNY, their only treat of the whole year. These days, she says children expect treats every day, so nobody wants to have more than one child, it's too much of a financial burden. It's certainly a very different world from her childhood!

In 2018, Taiwan officially became an "aged society" with 14% of the total population over 65 years old, and is expected to become a "super-aged society" by 2026, with over 20% over 65. It's a time of great transition, from being a country with many children and few old people, to exactly the opposite, and all in only one or two generations. In the last 20 years, our local area has seen the establishment of a number of care homes, the Presbyterian-run Shuang-Lien Elderly Home (SLEH) being the largest, with over 400 residents. My good friend, Mrs Hsu, has been living there for the last eight years, and as all her three children live overseas, her daughters often stay with me while they're visiting. Rev and Mrs Hsu and their family went from the Taiwan Presbyterian Church to pastor a Chinese Christian Fellowship in Mauritius from 1962–78, and their daughter, Alice, still lives there, married to Roger, former bishop in Madagascar. Alice came to Taiwan for Mrs Hsu's 91st birthday at the end of December, and is staying on for CNY. SLEH is a big employer in the local area, and SJU has opened a department of senior healthcare management in cooperation with them. Our students gain valuable practical experience at SLEH, as well as opportunities for long-term employment.

As we walk around the SJU sports track, we catch up with other neighbours. I ask how the spring-cleaning is going, and they all laugh! Apparently, even worse than cleaning is the daily preparation of



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**Location:** Taiwan

**My call:** To serve, share, and support the ministry of the Church in Taiwan.

**My role:** Working with the Taiwan Episcopal Church, based at St John's University, Taipei, I support the church, chaplaincy and kindergarten ministry of the Diocese of Taiwan.



*Celebrating Christmas with Bishop and Mrs Lai and staff at the diocesan office!*

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food offerings for CNY ancestor worship. They are very envious when I tell them I'll be travelling with friends over CNY to central, southern and eastern Taiwan, finishing up in the mountains of the east coast at the Bunun Farm Village. This village project was started by Rev KS Pai in 1984, supported by many churches in Taiwan, with the aim of encouraging the local Bunun indigenous people to remain in the area, rather than leaving for the cities in search of work. The village is a self-sustaining business with guest houses, restaurants, traditional dance performances, weaving, an organic farm and bamboo factory. I've been several times before, and it's a great place, with fresh mountain air and stunning views, far from the polluted cities of the west coast.

Polluted air from mainland China and Taiwan's own industries is causing big health problems on Taiwan's west coast, where 80% of the population live, and children are increasingly not allowed to go out to play during school break times. Our annual SJU charity fundraising project this Christmas was to raise over £8,000 to buy 60 ceiling fans to install in a residential centre for the disabled, run by the RC church in central Taiwan. To save money, they switch on the air-conditioning only when temperatures reach 28°C, but many of their residents are sensitive to poor air quality, so opening the windows creates its own problems, and ceiling fans are a great help.

Responding to the challenges of an ever-changing society is one area where the churches of Taiwan are working to bring transformation. The motto of Bishop James CL Wong, first Chinese Bishop of Taiwan (1965-70) and founder of SJU, was always "transforming lives through the life of Christ", meaning our Christian faith should lead us to work for transformation in all areas of life. His legacy lives on, and at the end of December, we welcomed 22 members of Bishop Wong's family to Taiwan to meet our clergy and to hear their stories of the great impact he had on their lives and ministry. It's a time of transition in our diocese, SJU and Advent Church too, as the most recent of Bishop Wong's successors, Bishop David JH Lai hands over to our future bishop, Lennon Yuan-Rung Chang, at his consecration and installation service on 22 February.

We thank God for Bishop Lai's faithful ministry and pray for him as he retires. He will be much missed, but I keep him in my prayers as I walk around the SJU sports track each day. Please join me in prayer for the Diocese of Taiwan in this time of transition, and also for the country too – we've just had elections, and President Tsai Ing-wen has been re-elected to serve a second term.

Ah, it's 6am, and just getting light, time for us all to go home and start the new day. Thank you, as always, for all your support and prayers!

Catherine

*Photos from top to bottom: Advent Church on Christmas Eve; Mrs Hsu, her helper and me; "感謝上帝!" "Thanks be to God!"; SJU Chaplaincy celebrates reaching our charity fundraising target!; looking down on the sea of clouds in the Yangmingshan mountains*



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