

Catherine Lee

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The call in action

Of porcupines, lions and elephants...

Hi there everyone!

Life in Taiwan during this tragedy of a pandemic has moved on from the rollercoaster experience that I described in my last link letter, in June. Things have settled down and normal life has resumed, albeit with temperature checks and face masks. Taiwan continues to keep the virus contained by closing the borders to all visitors, and only allowing in citizens and residents (all of whom must undergo a 14-day carefully-monitored quarantine) and by effective tracking and tracing; so far we've had a total of 553 confirmed cases and seven deaths. Really remarkable!

The fallout from the pandemic, however, is much more complicated. The African proverb "When elephants fight, the grass suffers" sums it up, as world leaders seek to distract from their own failings by blaming each other. Humiliation is never a good tactic in world politics, and while it might seem to work in the short term, no leader can afford to lose face and appear weak in front of their own people for long. As a result, military incursions in the skies and seas around Taiwan have increased dramatically, and the US is reporting on mainland China's massive naval buildup, possibly unlike anything seen since World War II, and advising Taiwan to rapidly develop its so-called "porcupine strategy" (yep, it's for real!) to defend itself militarily against the lion that is mainland China. I wonder myself if hedgehogs and steamrollers might be a more realistic analogy. Either way, I hear our church leaders fervently praying not only for peace, but also for a smooth and decisive US presidential election next month, an outcome that's expected to have direct implications for the stability of the region.

Meanwhile, just down the road from us at St John's University (SJU), on Taiwan's northwest coast, a huge crane has appeared and building work has started at a large electrical engineering company. Like most Taiwan companies, their headquarters and research facilities are here, but their main factories are in mainland China, while the small factory they do have here mostly employs migrant workers from the Philippines. Political and economic uncertainty caused by the pandemic plus Taiwan government pressure has resulted in the company deciding to close all their factories overseas and move them back to Taiwan, hence the expansion project. And with more migrant workers coming, they need housing, which is where SJU comes in. With much-reduced student numbers, there's lots of privately-owned student-style accommodation available locally that is now being let to migrant workers.



Name: Catherine Lee
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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.



Drinking tea on my visit to newly-retired Bishop David J H Lai and Mrs Lily Lai in their new home in Tainan

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SJU itself is deep into a major restructuring project to reduce costs and stabilise finances, but like all such projects, there is plenty of opposition and heartache, some also involving protests and the media. Sadly, such publicity further negatively impacts an already fraught situation, and will not help the recruitment of students for next year. But without such restructuring, bankruptcy could become a reality in the next few years, and that would be even worse. Bishop Lennon Yuan-Rung Chang, new bishop of Taiwan and new chair of SJU's board of trustees, plus the new SJU president, Dr Ben Hung-Pin Huang have their work cut out. Your prayers are requested please.

Having said all that, the students that we do have are so lovely, and our student fellowship continues to be a great asset to SJU, Advent Church and the whole diocese. Many continue to worship with us after graduation, and about half of our active clergy actually became Christians through the student fellowship. We have increasing numbers of students from Malaysia; many are already committed Christians who want to get involved and hope to stay on in Taiwan after graduation. A real blessing for Taiwan, but this kind of "brain drain" does not really help Malaysia long term. On the other hand, the economic downturn in the West is encouraging Taiwan's brightest and best there to return home to find work, affecting several of our church families. Some of their young men have to first catch up on their long-delayed military service, and so find themselves, somewhat reluctantly, becoming another spine in the porcupine that is Taiwan's military strategy.

Thank you for all your prayers and financial support, especially at this challenging time of the pandemic. I really appreciate all who have given financially and prayerfully to CMS for my support, but if you feel unable to continue, then I understand and please know that I am very grateful for all your help so far. A financial review by CMS suggested that I need to increase my funds to make up for shortfalls expected in the next year or two, so I am looking for extra link churches and supporters. If you have any ideas, please do get in touch.

Thank you also to those who have enquired of the effects of the pandemic on my immediate family, mostly in the UK, though my younger brother is in Dubai. Suffice it to say that the older generation are struggling with health problems involving hospital stays and care packages, the younger generation face their own challenges trying to avoid COVID-19 and lockdowns at university (they're at St Andrew's, Edinburgh and York) while those in-between are trying to stay cool, calm and collected to keep things rolling along for the others. But hey, we're all still smiling. Thanks be to God!

Catherine Lee

PS: For all other news, like the big mountain (Dabajianshan) we climbed in July, our summer camps and diocesan activities, please check out my blog at <https://catherinelee234.com/>. Looking forward to seeing you there!



Photos from top to bottom: Bike selfies, taken on my journey to the diocesan office in Taipei; mountain climbing (Dabajianshan); Taiwan diocesan convention

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Are you pondering a call to cross-cultural mission? We'd love to connect and help you discern what God might be saying. Find out more about how we can help you to step into God's mission at churchmissionsociety.org/explore

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If you would like to discuss your mailings with us or to receive this link letter on a regular basis, please email supporter.care@churchmissionsociety.org or call 01865 787400

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