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6 Oct 2014

Amplify 2014: All-Asia Open and Affirming Church and Life Conference in Singapore

by Joseph N. Goh

Last Month saw the Amplify Conference in Singapore in which LGBTQIs from the Asia Pacific region came together to discuss and explore gender and sexuality issues within Christianity.

Between September 12 and 14, 2014, approximately 200 people participated in the Amplify Conference (Amplify) at Free Community Church, Singapore. The theme of the Conference was 'Renewal'. This is the sixth All-Asia-Pacific Open and Affirming Church + Life Conference that gathers diverse lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans*, intersex and queer persons, as well as straight-identifying allies (LGBTIQS) to share personal stories and learn more about intersecting issues of gender, sexuality and the Christian faith.

Participants included clergy and non-clergy delegates from Australia, China (both mainland and Hong Kong), Indonesia, Japan, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, South Korea, Taiwan and the USA. Keynote speakers included Bishop Yvette Flunder of the City of Refuge in San Francisco, USA, Rev. Elder Darlene Garner of the Metropolitan Community Churches and Rev. Dr. Yap Kim Hao, the Pastoral Advisor to the Free Community Church. The conference was also graced by the presence of Bishop Flunder's spouse, 'Mother' Shirley Miller, Australian singer-songwriter Natasha Holmes, and Pastor Twanna Grause of New Jersey, USA.

On Friday, September 12, Bishop Flunder and Elder Garner led a Pre-Conference Leadership workshop on developing communities on the margins. On Saturday, September 13, Rev. Yap delivered a stirring address that called for greater inclusivity of lesbian women and straight-identifying persons, attention towards other vulnerable groups and more radical theologies. Various concurrent workshops were held throughout the day. In the morning, Rev. Garner wove the theme of 'new creation' into issues of church renewal. Holmes discussed challenges of worship. Pastor Pauline Ong of Singapore led a discussion on emotional baggage. Malaysian-born Rev. Joe Pang who resides in Hong Kong spoke on communication skills for conflict resolution.

In the afternoon, Malaysian academic and theological activist Rev. Joseph N. Goh provided a rethinking of sex and sexuality as possibilities for deeper connection with God. Singaporean Pastor Gary Chan's workshop examined how non-clergy Christians affect cultures and communities. Rev. Miak Siew of Singapore facilitated a session on developing healthy small groups. Malaysian-born Rev. Ngeo Boon Lin who resides in New York, USA, explained the development of the LGBTI movement and its impact on theological and ecclesiastical discourses. The day ended with Bishop Flunder's talk on the renewal of purpose, ministry and accountability. Praise and worship sessions, small group discussions, musical presentations and solo performances were held throughout the conference.

On Sunday, September 14, Amplify 2014 concluded with a Sunday Service. In her sermon, Rev. Garner spoke of letting go, respect for difference, the need for dialogue and change, and the quest for new forms of doing church instead of merely resting on traditional ideas of 'gay churches'. Unity in diversity among clergy and non-clergy was at its most evident during Communion when bread and grape juice were prayed over in Bahasa Indonesia, Cantonese, English, Mandarin and Tagalog before being shared. In a Post-Conference session after the service, Small Luk, an intersex activist and counsellor, spoke on her personal experiences and work.

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