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Sharing about Taiwan on my visit to CMS Oxford

Dear all,

Greetings to you all for the Year of the Rabbit!

It's 9.15pm two nights before Chinese (Lunar) New Year and people are gathering on the street corner near St John's Cathedral, Taipei with bags of rubbish and recycling. I'm there too with about 10 large flattened cardboard boxes, the result of my moving house a few days before. At 9.19pm, exactly on time, three bin lorries appear, accompanied by loud music to alert everyone they're here. They're playing The Maiden's Prayer by Tekla Bądarzewska-Baranowska – in other places the bin lorries play Für Elise. Taiwan's musical garbage trucks are famous worldwide, and roaming the streets five evenings a week has no doubt helped to contribute to Taiwan's status as the safest country in the world in which to walk alone at night. So, welcome to my new world of downtown Taipei City!

I've been back in Taiwan since 8 January, and moved from St John's University, on Taiwan's northwest coast, into central Taipei about a week later, a distance of about 30km (20 miles). This move is at the suggestion of Bishop Lennon Yuan-Rung Chang and with my support, so from now on I'll be based at St John's Cathedral, close to the National Taiwan University campus, where there are plenty of opportunities for outreach among students and the local community. A new year, a new place and a new challenge, so watch this space – and please note my new address!

I left Taiwan for the UK on 7 July; the day Boris Johnson announced his resignation as prime minister. In fact, my six months in the UK coincided with a fairly eventful time in British politics and life in general and covered three prime ministers, four chancellors, two monarchs; summer heatwaves and drought, winter snow and flooding; strikes and NHS, mental health and cost-of-living crises, and of course COVID and flu. Having not had a single cold or cough in my previous three years in Taiwan, I ended up having COVID twice and flu once, two of those caught from my dear beloved 90-year-old mum, who recovered from both far more quickly than I did; she's really tough! I put many of my usual travels on hold this time to visit her as much as possible, 60 visits in all, and fortunately she's now much more settled in her new care home in Grange-over-Sands, with its gorgeous views over Morecambe Bay. As I was based in her home at Calgarth, Troutbeck Bridge, I was able to make the most of the beautiful Lake District

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mountains and counted off about 60 Wainwrights, with some spectacular views and memorable ascents like Jack's Rake, ah it was fun! For those of you using Mum's Calgarth address, please note we have now given that up and moved out completely on December 31.

My little blue car, a Nissan Note, got me everywhere I needed to go, even if it did have an occasional waterfall of windscreen wash that would randomly cascade down the inside of the back window while I was driving along; just had to smile and keep on going! I am grateful that driving a total of almost 11,000km (6,800 miles) otherwise went smoothly – that's just a bit more than the distance from the UK to Taiwan. Apologies that I couldn't visit everyone I wanted to; time just ran out! It was great to visit the CMS offices in Oxford and to see you all in my CMS link churches. Thank you to everyone for such a warm welcome.

What else happened while I was in the UK? Well, NatWest informed all its overseas-based customers like me that unless we're permanently based in the UK, we have to close all our accounts. Oh, what joy – not! I'm now with Starling Bank, and the only danger so far has been in slicing off the top of my finger as I far too enthusiastically cut up all those now-useless NatWest bank cards! Armed with my new bank account, off I went to buy gifts to bring back to Taiwan, including 25 bags of gold chocolate coins, which have proved a great hit at Chinese New Year, especially eaten after yummy meals with friends. Just like Christmas, a lot of New Year celebrations involve food – check out the photos, all those meals were delicious!

Newly moved to Taipei last week, off I went to explore the nearby Da'an Forest Park, and was amazed to see a kingfisher on my first visit. I just love kingfishers and all those stunning colours! I also went to choose a new public dental clinic, though I'm spoilt for choice, with so many within walking distance and all taking new patients. Expecting to register and make an appointment for a few weeks' time, instead they ushered me in, and within 20 minutes I'd had a full teeth x-ray and cleaning, all for NT$150 (£4). Taiwan's public health service is excellent, and keeping case numbers fairly stable during the pandemic has been one of the success stories of recent times. Apart from at home, we're still all wearing facemasks indoors, but people are now more relaxed about sharing meals with others; so important at this time of New Year celebrations, when family reunions feature big-time.

Giving thanks to God for his many blessings over the past six months in the UK, and as I start again here in Taiwan, with new challenges of ministry ahead in Taipei and in the wider diocese; please continue to keep me in your prayers. Thank you!

Catherine Lee

Photos from top to bottom: *What a great view from my mum's care home at Grange-over-Sands!; Great Gable; meals and dishes I had at Christmas; Chinese New Year: all delicious!*

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