



Catherine Lee

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Location: Taiwan



What I do: Working with the Taiwan Episcopal Church, supporting the church and kindergarten ministry of the Diocese of Taiwan

“Taiwan needs the world, just as the world needs Taiwan. Taiwan is not just opening a door to the world – Taiwan is already on the world’s centre stage.” Words spoken by Taiwan’s brand-new president, Lai Ching-te, during his inauguration speech on Monday 20 May. Our diocesan office is within walking distance of the Presidential Office in central Taipei, so that morning I walked down to have a look and unexpectedly found myself going through security to join the crowd in the public viewing area – so I watched it all happen, including the flypast that went right overhead!

It’s not just Taiwan that needs the world and vice versa, we all need each other. After Taiwan’s big 7.2 earthquake at 7:58am on 3 April, many of you got in touch to offer support and prayer, for which we are all grateful. Thank you! That day was also my birthday – certainly one to remember, and although we were all shaken and shocked, still our cathedral kindergarten managed to organise a birthday party for me only an hour or so later. For many weeks afterwards though, we were rocked by aftershocks, large and small, and even now life proceeds with a certain caution. The epicentre was on Taiwan’s scenic east coast at Hualien, and nearly all the 20 people killed were hikers hit by landslides in Taroko Gorge, now closed for the foreseeable future, which is already badly affecting Hualien’s tourism industry and the economy of the whole east coast. I visited Taroko Gorge twice last year, it really is spectacular.

It was only a few days after the earthquake that our visitors started to arrive from overseas to attend the 12th World Anglican Chinese Clergy Fellowship, hosted by Bishop Lennon Yuan-Rung Chang and the Diocese of Taiwan from 9–12 April in Taipei. Over 140 Chinese clergy and their spouses came from all over Asia, Australia, USA and Canada, and it was really encouraging for us that they all still came, despite the earthquake. It was a wonderful week for everyone! Bishop Stephen Soe and some of the clergy from West Malaysia then stayed on for a few days to lead a diocesan workshop on church planting. This is a big focus for the Diocese of Taiwan in the future as we grow and expand, from the current two deaneries into three, then hopefully from three deaneries into three dioceses, which should qualify Taiwan to become a separate province within the Anglican Communion. We have an opening service



President Lai's inauguration

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for our newest church in Linkou this weekend, and we're looking to open another in southern Taiwan in the next few months too. Many of the areas we're looking at for church planting are new housing developments on Taiwan's west coast built around the science parks, home to Taiwan's famous semiconductor companies. Please do pray for us!

Meanwhile, I'm living and working at St John's Cathedral, Taipei, located in one of Taiwan's most densely populated districts, Da'an, which is also Taiwan's most expensive area to buy or rent a place to live. The challenges for local people are immense; many live in small apartments in old buildings, built years ago before strict earthquake building codes were introduced, and are waiting for redevelopment.

Directly opposite our cathedral is one such redevelopment, a row of old five-storey buildings now being replaced with a 23-storey luxury apartment block. A stagnant economy, falling birth rate, aging society and despondent youth are much in evidence in this area of Taipei City, and are big challenges for Taiwan's new president. He also faces the uphill task of ruling without a legislative majority, which has already led to big protests, and more to be expected. Ah yes, and peace across the Taiwan Strait is of course a major prayer point too.

But Da'an is not all bad news, and the area is also famous for the very large Da'an Forest Park, built on the site of a former military dependents' village and full of trees, flowers, ponds, a huge colony of herons and egrets and even fireflies. There's water fountains powered by exercise bicycles, frequent flower festivals and outdoor concerts. It's open 24 hours, very safe, and in the very early morning, full of people doing their exercise, with all sorts of uniformed groups from Praise Dance to Martial Arts. You'll often find me there too – though not in a uniformed group!

Da'an also has some of the largest churches in Taiwan with many young people. St. John's Cathedral too has a bustling youth scene and many of them are my students, friends or colleagues. At Pentecost this past Sunday, red was the colour and the streamers just added to the fun!

We are celebrating the 70th anniversary of the Taiwan Episcopal Church this year, with a big celebration planned for Saturday 28 September. There is much to be thankful for, and Bishop Chang's plan is to mark the celebrations by holding a series of evangelistic events, so please join us in praying for Taiwan!

You'll notice that when I write about Taiwan, I mostly write "we" and "us" rather than "they" and "them". Yes, belonging is important; for me being part of the church in Taiwan is part of my calling, rather than just standing on the edge supporting from a distance. Taiwan is on the edge in so many ways, geographically, diplomatically, politically, but we are all part of the body of Christ, and called to belong – and help others on the edge to belong too. May God lead us and draw us all closer to him.

Thank you again for all your support, always much appreciated.

Catherine Lee



Photos from top to bottom:
Taroko Gorge, July 2023; Da'an Forest Park; Pentecost



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