

Taiwanese mission creates connections

Erana Taka of Te Aka Puaho and Darren Koo from the Auckland Chinese Presbyterian Church recently represented the Presbyterian Church at "I Love Taiwan", the annual mission programme run by the Presbyterian Church in Taiwan. Darren shares his experience of an exciting and enlightening time.

Darren Koo says the multicultural faith-based mission I Love Taiwan is not only a once in a lifetime opportunity for individuals, but a global opportunity for the Presbyterian Church.

"It's good for the Church because while it's about personal spiritual development, it is also about the development of the churches. I would like to see it not just in Taiwan but round the world."

Darren, 31, who is a member of the Auckland Chinese Presbyterian Church, attended the inter-faith programme in Taiwan in June and early July this year, along with Erana Taka from Te Aka Puaho. They both received a grant from the Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand to assist with their attendance.

Darren moved to New Zealand from Australia with his IT job three years ago. He was looking at church options and found the Auckland Chinese Presbyterian Church on the internet. "I looked at it online, and on the same morning my Mum texted me from Brisbane asking me to go to that church!"

"I found it a welcoming, warm place, and I enjoyed the structure of the programme" he says. Darren was baptised last year, and is currently involved in the music team, particularly helping with the technology – his forte. He also runs a free table tennis club at the church, with a focus on outreach.

He says that minister the Rev Dr Stuart Vogel talked about the I Love Taiwan programme, which is for 16 to 35 year olds, in church one Sunday during notices and asked if anyone had a calling to go.



Darren Koo, left, was based at a church in Taiwan with fellow I Love Taiwan programme participants: Jora (Taiwan), Noelle (Canada), Choong Man (South Korea), Yiting (Singapore) and Nina (Canada).

Darren did – and was prepared to use all of his annual leave.

Only about 10-15 per cent of the Taiwanese people at I Love Taiwan spoke English. Darren had the advantage of speaking Cantonese, which is similar to Mandarin – the official language of Taiwan. "A native language called Mother Tongue is rather like Māori," says Darren. "I did not understand a lot of what people said, but I understood enough to get by."

He describes the mission as having a camp feel with "lots of people from different countries doing everything together – worshipping, eating, sharing rooms. We slept four to a room, on sleeping mats. It was a very warm, receptive environment, and I quickly felt a close connection with a lot of people." He says he was surprised at who was there – mainly people from South East Asia (though not Indonesia or the Philippines) and the Pacific Rim, as well as Americans and Canadians, but no one from Australia, Britain or Europe.

The participants were sent to local churches, some of which had been hit hard by the super typhoon. Darren was assigned to Changhua Church for a fortnight and to a summer camp for children in a mountain area.

"We taught them the song 'Let Me Stay'. I had to learn it in Mandarin. At the end they were singing it and crying. They really did want to stay!"

Jane Tolerton **Spanz**

Would you like to attend

**I LOVE TAIWAN
2017?**

Enquiries about the programme can be made by contacting the Presbyterian Church's Global Mission Coordinator, the Rev Phil King, email phil@presbyterian.org.nz or phone (04) 381 8294.

The main cost of the programme is return airfares to Taiwan. Successful applicants will receive a subsidy from the Presbyterian Church's Global Mission. The remainder of the costs need to be borne by the applicant and his or her church.

I Love Taiwan is run by the Presbyterian Church in Taiwan between late June and early July each year. Young adults aged 16-35 years, from all over the world, participate in a multicultural faith-based event. Participants learn about the life and culture of Taiwan, and share in the mission of the church, while meeting like-minded young adult Christians.