



## Youth love Taiwan exchange

**"Growing global followers of Jesus Christ" is the tag-line of the Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa's Global Mission.**

It's also what inspired two young Auckland students, Elisa Soerjadi and Thomas Loho, to take part in the *I Love Taiwan* programme, a two-week cross-cultural exchange that brings 16 to 34-year-olds from across the globe to Taiwan.

Both Elisa and Thomas are members of St Andrew's Presbyterian Church in Symonds Street, which has English and Indonesian speaking congregations. They are both active in the Indonesian congregation's youth group and say they heard about the annual *I Love Taiwan* programme from Rev Dr Stuart Vogel.

"Stuart encouraged us to apply and as I'd never been on a mission before, but had always wanted to, I jumped at the chance," says Elisa (20), who is currently in her final semester of an accounting and commercial law degree at Auckland University.

"What interested me was meeting other people from different countries and understanding the culture and church of Taiwan. I was also keen on seeing what learnings I could bring back to New Zealand," says Elisa, who moved to New Zealand from Jakarta when she was seven years old.

This year's programme, which was hosted by the Presbyterian Church of Taiwan, ran from 1-18 July, but Elisa and Thomas flew to Taipei a few days earlier to take in the sights and catch up with their respective families.

The programme kicked off with a three-day Christian youth camp, which brought together the 180 or so participants from 16 countries. They were divided into groups of six to eight and were then sent out to different parts of Taiwan.

Elisa was sent to Hualien, on the east coast of Taiwan, a rural area where the living conditions were a little challenging.

"I didn't expect it to be so basic. We stayed in a small house and slept on the floor. The conditions also weren't very hygienic."



The Rev Mark Wen and Wen Shimu of the Taiwanese - Auckland Presbyterian Church prayed for a safe trip for Elisa Soerjadi and Thomas Loho. On behalf of Te Aka Puaho they were entrusted with *Papiera Tapu*, the Maori Bible, to present to the Pingtung Church in Taiwan.

But Elisa says it was a good reminder of how unimportant material possessions really are.

"The locals had so little but they were so happy. It was a real eye-opener."

Elisa's group helped to run a camp for children whose parents were at work. "They weren't Christian but that didn't matter. We taught them Christian songs and prayers."

She also worked with the elderly, learning how to weave and cook dumplings, and Elisa says something similar could work with the church's elderly in New Zealand.

It was also Thomas' first mission trip and he says he was motivated to join the programme by a desire to give back.

"I currently lead the Indonesian youth group and play the piano for the church but I wanted to see where else I could help."

Thomas (24) is currently finishing his chemical engineering degree at Auckland University. He had quite a different experience to Elisa, staying in Taipei at the Shulin Presbyterian Church.

"I thought I'd be doing physical work, such as building or digging trenches, but I ended up mentoring at a teenage church camp," says Thomas. "However, I trust God wherever he puts me and

although I thought I would be useless because I don't speak the language, we had translators to help. It was a challenge, but a good challenge."

Thomas was in a group of nine with participants from the US, Hong Kong, Canada, Malaysia and Korea, as well as two local youth, and says he particularly enjoyed working with the elderly during his mission.

"On a Tuesday afternoon, they get the elderly together as a social event but also to talk about God. These people are lonely because their children and grandchildren are at school or work but the afternoon sessions give them something to do."

Having now completed their first overseas mission, both Elisa and Thomas are keen to undertake another one.

Rev Phil King, Global Mission Coordinator, has thrown his weight behind the *I Love Taiwan* programme.

"It's a great opportunity for young adults from the Presbyterian Church to learn about life in Taiwan, to cross cultural barriers and get to know their peers from all over the world," says Phil.

"The focus isn't on evangelism, it's about expanding participants' world view and experience. I'd encourage any of our young people to apply for next year's programme."

Sharon Stephenson [Spanz](#)