

## REFLECTING ON A VISIT TO CWM PARTNER THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF TAIWAN



*Chi-Oang Memorial Church*

When I was ordained, in 1979, the Council for World Mission, having been formed in 1977, was in its infancy. I will remember the world church interest of those days in what was then Scottish Congregationalism and that much of it was focussed on Taiwan. In 1979 the Presbyterian Church of Taiwan was very much in the world church news and offered us all much cause for concern and prayer. It was a time when human rights in Taiwan were at a low ebb. There was a great deal of persecution and oppression. The Presbyterian Church of Taiwan has always been active in issues of justice and, at that time, paid the price for speaking up. The General

Secretary then was Dr. Kao, a name that I remember being much mentioned and prayed for in those days of 1979 and beyond.

It was thus a fascinating and stimulating opportunity that came my way in 2010 with the opportunity to be part of a small group of URC senior leaders visiting Taiwan. Back in 1979 Dr. Kao was imprisoned – and we were reminded during the visit that it is easy to remember how long he was in prison. Just think of 4, 3, 2, 1 – it was four years, three months and twenty-one days. One of the places we visited was the Chi-Lin Foundation in Ilan County which offers a fascinating insight into the history of Taiwan's Democratic Movement. It has become a repository for all sorts of interesting and relevant material. It was founded by Lawyer Lin and his wife in an attempt to bring something positive out of the murder of his mother and their twin daughters, then aged 7, on 28<sup>th</sup> February 1980.



*Paul at Kaohsiung*

The foundation was established in 1991 and at the ceremony to mark its opening Mr. Lin told a story that bears repeating. At the base of the Himalayas there is a bamboo forest in which



*Memorial at Chi-Lin*

many birds and animals live. One day, a strong wind made the bamboos scrape against each other, resulting in a fire. The fire grew larger and some of the animals started to run away. A parrot flew into the sky and could have escaped the forest fire. However, he loved the bamboo forest where he grew up and appreciated the forest for offering him shelter. In addition, he could not bear seeing his companions suffer. Thus, he soaked his wings in a nearby pond and then flew into the sky to spread water on to the fire. He continuously repeated this seemingly ineffective action.

The compassion of the parrot and his sacrificial spirit moved God. God descended from heaven and said to the parrot, 'Your actions are praiseworthy. But how will you extinguish the fire with the drops of water collected from your wings?' The parrot answered, 'appreciation and compassion guarantees success,' In the end, God was moved and helped put out the fire. However, if there were 100,000 or a million parrots that simultaneously performed the same act, perhaps God's help would not have been necessary to extinguish the fire. So, we were reminded to do the little bit that we can.

Another visit during that trip was to Bunun Village. We met with the pastor who explained something of the origin of that community. He had felt that the tribal people were losing their

identity, specifically his own Bunun tribe, and wanted to do something about it and so, progressively, built up a community which offers a facility with all sorts of possibilities for crafts, coffee shop, a gift shop, places to stay, cultural show. This employs something like a hundred people and has really made a big contribution to giving an identity and keeping people in the community. He explained that he thinks that it is very important to do that and that even when there are small churches that they should be supported to stay in place.



*Cultural Dancing at Truku*

Paul Whittle