

A short day by day summary of Graham's to Yangon & Manila, January 16 - February 3, 2018-02-03

Tuesday January 16

Depart London Heathrow 1000

Wednesday January 17

Arrive Yangon (via Kuala Lumpur) 1015

Evening meal with two faculty from MEGST (Myanmar Evangelical Graduate School of Theology) who will act as coaches for the training later in the week. My Increase & Interserve friend & colleague Siebe Meindersma (Area Dean for the TEE programme of the College of Christian Theology, Bangladesh, in North-West Bangladesh) arrives around 2300. His Biman (Bangladesh Airlines) plane had accelerated to take off, but then slowed down again due to a technical fault. He wasn't sure if he was going to be able to come - as the next scheduled flight wasn't until Friday...

Thursday January 18

Meeting with Dr Ronald (Academic Dean at MEGST) and Rev Cho (Korean missionary who has translated TEE courses into Burmese) and the other two faculty helping with the TEE training. We discuss the training, especially the role of the coaches, and have lunch together.

Friday January 19

The first day of the TEE training.

Dr Ronald wants to train the MEGST class who are soon to graduate with the skills to facilitate foundation level discipleship TEE materials. We have to get to the venue early to re-arrange the seating completely - we don't have participants sitting in rows of desks, but round tables in groups of five. Our training is very participative. The first session and a half is a bit slow - Dr Ronald explains that the students are not so used to this training method. But once they get going, it's very lively all the way.

Saturday January 20

Second day of the TEE training.

It's a very good experience - probably one of the best in terms of active participation. At the end, when the students report back against the hopes and expectations that they had at the start of the training, there are very positive comments. Of course, the real fruit that we pray for is only going to come later... many groups starting up in the churches.

In the evening, Siebe and I meet for an evening meal with two Interserve couples based in Yangon. Great!

Sunday January 21

Siebe & I walk to Every Nation church, an international church led by a Myanmar pastor. After the service we all share a meal, and then spend some hours talking with the Interserve partner we met yesterday and the pastor of the church. We walk back to our hotel through the People's Park, and skirting the (huge) Shwedagon Pagoda complex, an unmistakeable symbol of the strength of Buddhism in Burmese culture.

Monday January 22

We walk to the Myanmar Christian Preachers Training Centre, a Chinese-language Bible School using Chinese language TEE. It's great to know their vision to see TEE training used in all the 30-odd Chinese churches in their network in Myanmar.

We take a taxi back to the hotel to meet with someone who used to use Burmese TEE materials. We knew him some years ago, and it's good to catch up. Then we meet with a European couple who have been in Myanmar for years, whose focus is on the Rohingya people. They are about to move to Bangladesh to continue that work. It is a fascinating and sobering couple of hours. Finally, one of the faculty who helped with the training and her husband, who is an ethnic Kachin Myanmar, take us to a downtown Kachin restaurant. They would very much like us to return and train group leaders in Kachin State. It's been a full day!

Tuesday January 23

Siebe stays on in Myanmar for a couple of days. I travel to Manila via Kuala Lumpur, arriving at the venue for the meetings at around 11.00 pm.

Wednesday January 24

The Asia Theological Association's Commission for Accreditation and Educational Development (CAED) meets today. This is a very good group of about a dozen people, and as this is my fourth time at these meetings, I know the group quite well. Lots of good discussions. I present a short piece on examples of partnership between residential seminaries and TEE training programmes.

Thursday January 25

The Asia Theological Association's Board Meeting begins today. I have been asked to take the minutes. It is very interesting to hear the issues being discussed. In the evening we all go out for a buffet supper... Marinated pig's ear is one of the things on the menu. Yum? ... After that a long conversation about possibilities for TEE in Japan with my friend Dr Makito.

Friday January 26

The Board meetings finish at lunch time. After that a small group of us - just ten or so - go on an excursion up into the hills. It's great to be able to spend time together in a different context. We stay the night in Tagaytay, overlooking a beautiful volcanic crater lake.

Saturday January 27

We visit the gardens of a Catholic retreat centre in the morning, and then see some cultural presentations over lunch. Back down in the afternoon, and it takes hours to crawl through the Manila traffic.

Sunday January 28

The ATA India Secretary and I have a sort of impromptu service in our room before he goes off to the airport. Then I meet with an OMF mission partner who is sending a group to the training later in the week. Later, one of the Philippino group who will facilitate the training with me come to collect me. There are five in the Philippino group. Four are from the Bethany Fellowship in the countryside, including Pastora Rosana and her husband. They have been using TEE for some years. One is from the city, Pastor Jonathan, and he has studied TEE courses for two years. He has a real vision to introduce grass roots TEE more widely. We meet to discuss the structure of the training, and the role of the coaches. They take me to the 'Happy to Mingle' Hostel where I will be staying for the next few nights.

Monday January 29

A day to rest, and begin writing up the ATA Board Minutes. Pastor Jonathan takes me out to Jollibee - the Philippines' answer to McDonalds - for lunch.

Tuesday January 30

The first day of the TEE training

The training takes place in the Sunday School room of the Korean Union Church of Manila. It's great to be co-facilitating the training with Pra Rosana, one of the Increase Equippers, whom I've known since 2010. She does a great job. The participants are mostly pastors, and so the training encourages them to explore a different way of leading a small group - less talking, more questions, and more listening. It's exciting to see them trying it out...

Wednesday January 31

The second day of the TEE training.

A good conclusion with Pra Rosana leading her sections really well. After the training finishes, I go with the four from the countryside to the home of Rosana's sister.

Thursday February 1

We go to meet with Dr Azriel. This meeting has He's the Dean of the Asia Graduate School of Theology in the Philippines. I've met him before and he's very interested in grass roots TEE as a tool to help church leaders equip their congregations. It's very encouraging to see the way that he 'clicks' with my four TEE friends from the countryside, and there's planning for TEE trainings in the future. He's also very interested in the farm that they have, and how they grow their rice, what kind of fertilizer they use etc etc...

Friday February 2

Today is the last day of my trip, and we are excited because we have opportunity to meet with CAMACOP leaders. CAMACOP stands for the Christain & Missionary Alliance Church of the Philippines. There are some 3,000 churches in the denomination. They've been using TEE for decades, and are now looking to encourage more churches to join the TEE programme, and to extend their range of courses. There's lots to talk about! It's great to hear their President talk of his passion for TEE, and their head of Education say: *We are very focussed. We use TEE for training in evangelism, church planting and mission.*

After lunch with the CAMACOP leaders, we adjourn to a nearby coffee shop, and debrief with the four from the Bethany Fellowship. It's been a really encouraging week.

My flight leaves Manila at 2220, and after a five hour stopover in Kuwait, I arrive at Heathrow at 1345 on Saturday.

All in all, an extremely encouraging time away. It feels as though the Lord has lined everything up, and I'm very grateful!