

Visit to attend the Consecration of Ven Charles Samuel as Assistant Bishop in the Diocese of West Malaysia.

Below is a brief report and reflection prepared for Bishop Jonathan and Philip Swan on my few days in Kuala Lumpur representing Bishop Jonathan at the Consecration of Ven Charles Samuel as Assistant Bishop of West Malaysia. October 1st – 6th 2014.

Apart from the two days spent travelling, I had three full days in Malaysia which was a very short time in which to try and better understand the context and challenges of the church in that country. It was however, a “total immersion” and the people I met were unfailingly hospitable and warm.

Kuala Lumpur



I was met at the airport by one of the Churchwardens of St Mary’s Cathedral. I can’t recall whether he was People’s or Vicar’s warden but in Malaysia that makes a big difference. I gather the Vicar (or Dean in this case) gets to choose his own warden; something not permitted by our rules but which would no doubt would be an attractive proposition to



some of our colleagues! For the first two nights I was accommodated at the very plush St Mary’s Residences, four tower blocks with large service apartments which were built on land that formerly was occupied by the Cathedral school. The Diocese has a good deal with the developers allowing the use of some of the apartments and some proportion of the rent. I gather the last Clergy Retreat was held there with two clergy families per luxury apartment!

The Friday gave me an opportunity to look around KL before the Consecration at 4pm. The president and preacher at the service was the Archbishop of SE Asia, Most Revd Bolly Lapok who preached fearlessly against the Allah ban. The Allah controversy is a major issue for the church and was mentioned to me repeatedly during my visit. It is as much a political and ethnic matter as it is a religious one but not to be able to address God in public worship by a word you have used for centuries feels a very hostile and aggressive move.

The Consecration Service was Common Worship and the music A&M and, in true Anglican fashion, there were plenty of lawyers present and much reading of oaths and licenses. I had a good conversation with Bishop Bolly, Bishop Moon Hing, the Dean of Singapore, Kuan Kim Seng and others following the service as we waited for the KL traffic to unblock so we could go on to the celebration meal. They were very grateful for the Lichfield link and sent very warm best wishes to Bishop Jonathan. They also remembered Godfrey Stone with great affection. There was however a concern that the Church of England in general had become too liberal in its thinking and had fallen away from a truly orthodox faith.

The celebration banquet that followed the Consecration was held at a cavernous Chinese restaurant at which there were tanks full of Tilapia fish, many courses, an endless supply of China tea, a Country and Western band and speeches. It is interesting to see how these



things play out in a more deferential society. It was hard to imagine such an event to honour the making of a new assistant bishop in this country (something felt too by an Australian bishop whom I sat next to at the meal). I also sat next to the Dean of Singapore who made sure that a non-chopstick wielding person like me was not left behind when the food came. He will also be a consecrated as an Assistant Bishop soon and it was fascinating to hear the plans of the church in Singapore to expand their missionary deaneries of Nepal, Cambodia, Laos and Viet Nam. They do not lack vision and ambition. Kuan Kim Seng was clear that what he needed was English people who could teach English in these

countries – this is the new bridgehead into other cultures, suspicious of other forms of Western missionary endeavour.

I met Miriam Samuels briefly. Clearly her time in Lichfield was very formative for her and people commented how she had returned a much more confident and outgoing person. She herself told me she was finding it hard to adjust to life back in Penang. She had written a song for her father and performed it at the banquet. I had only the shortest of conversations with Charles Samuel but was able to read out and pass on Bishop Jonathan's letter to him and I think he was very touched.



On my table were the two assistant Bishops of Sabah who both mentioned Bishop Jonathan's letter/email of condolence following the death of their Diocesan Bishop and were clearly very moved and grateful to have received it. One of the Bishops, Melter Tais said he had emailed back and was anxious that Bishop Jonathan had received it.

I had a number of people come up to me after the meal that had been to Lichfield Diocese in past asking to be remembered to their hosts.

There was one sadness hanging over the proceedings. The Archdeacon of the Southern Archdeaconry, Edward John's daughter had gone to college in Newcastle-upon-Tyne to study law (or medicine – I heard both accounts), had caught some kind of fever there and died having been in the UK only three weeks. I understand there have been good contacts with the Diocese of Newcastle. Edward's wife had gone out to the UK but he had no passport and was trying to sort this out. He did not attend the consecration.

Kajang



On Saturday and Sunday I was looked after by Revd Lee Con Yim, Vicar of St Katherine's, Kajang a town some 30km south of KL. Con is ethnically Chinese and his congregation largely Indian. He has a Malay curate. The church's main service was English speaking but there were also Bahasa Malay and Tamil speaking congregations who met separately. There is an issue with shortage of clergy and it is not always easy to match a priest up to the appropriate ethnic/language group.

In fact, Con had grown up in the UK and attended All Souls, Langham place so was also of a somewhat different ecclesiastical tradition to St Katherine's too which was more traditional and liturgical.

I preached at the English speaking service in bare feet as it is the tradition in the Indian majority churches to take off your shoes before going to church. It was Golden Circle Sunday and so the service was led by the congregation's over-50s with great verve and



there was a cake and Indian food after the service to celebrate. Again the Liturgy was Common Worship with a written Bahasa Malay translation in the order of service – full of prayers to Allah, of course. I went to the Sunday School after the service which began with a very lively (and good) worship session led by Meera the Superintendent. After the worship the children had to sit an exam on the Ten Commandments but they seemed happy enough to do so.



As is, I understand, typical, we eat out for every meal so I enjoyed a range of food though predominately. The hosting was shared with the family of the Vicar's warden, David. (married to Meera). As well as eating out we visited the administrative centre of Purajaya and the new high-tech town of Cyberjaya, very different to the rather ramshackle Kajang.

As always in a predominantly Muslim country the 5-times-a-day call to prayer was a constant reminder that the church was ministering in a very different context to our own.

It was a long way to go for three days but well worth it and I am grateful for the opportunity. These visits are clearly appreciated. One of the Bishop's at the Consecration remarked, "Lichfield are always here!"

Kemuliaan kepada Allah di tempat yang Mahatinggi. Dan damai sejahtera kepada umatNya di bumi.

Tuhan Allah, Raja di syurga. Allah dan Bapa yang Mahakuasa. Kami menyembah Engkau, kami bersyukur kepadaMu. Kami memuji Engkau sebab kemuliaanMu.

Tuhan Yesus Kristus, Anak tunggal Bapa. Tuhan Allah, Domba Allah. Yang menanggung dosa dunia. Kasihanilah kami. Engkau yang duduk di sebelah kanan Allah Bapa. Terimalah doa kami.