

All at SE Asia



A team from across the Diocese spent a fortnight in SE Asia in October supporting Bishop Michael in strengthening the links with our companion dioceses there.

The visit included time in all the dioceses of the Province of SE Asia - Singapore, West Malaysia, Kuching and Sabah. Here are some reflections.

"The most interesting thing is talking to Christians in Malaysia, living in an Islamic country and relating that to Christians in the UK living in a secular society. Those in Malaysia feel somewhat pressurised by the state and I think, to a certain extent Christians do in the UK, we feel we can't express our Christianity as openly as we'd like. The difference is that in Malaysia if you do evangelise, you get arrested."
Steve Deall - curate, Great Haywood



Steve & Gill meeting students in Terengganu.

"The sense was of a Chinese community in an enclave and they'd feel frightened if they lived anywhere but those two streets. But the ministry they're doing with university students was inspiring - they find ways round so many restrictions to reach out and share the gospel. It's quite sobering how luke-warm we can be and yet how they still reach out to Chinese students. The fervour of some of those young people is so encouraging. The challenges are very different between the two countries."

Gill Carding - Reader, St Giles' Shrewsbury

A gathering of St Chad's Volunteers past and future in Petaling Jaya, Kuala Lumpur, along with Bishop Michael and the archbishop of SE Asia, Most Revd Ng Moon Hing.



"It's been an amazing experience. I was so enthusiastic about going partly because I'd been to other parts of Malaysia but never to the east coast myself."

"The communities were very different there. In Terengganau they felt to us as though they'd got their backs to the wall. It was tough being Christians in a very hostile environment because of the political, social and legal pressure on them from a Muslim community of about 98%."

Michael Carding - St Chad's Volunteer Programme coordinator



An Orang Asli house church meeting (above). Former St Chads Volunteers Christopher Soe and Andrew Soon guiding the team through a street breakfast in Penang (right).

"One of the best things I experienced is visiting the Orang Asli people in their home. Unlike most of the people we've met, we had no shared culture other than the language of smiling but knowing we had a shared experience of our faith. That's been really poignant for me - just being as far culturally as we can get from home and yet having that shared faith in Jesus."

"In talking to the young people and experiencing a bit of the youth culture here, I've noticed one similarity and one difference. I've been really aware of the privilege we have in the UK - I can go into a school assembly and speak to 2-300 young people. I think I may have taken it a little bit for granted - you just can't do that here. The similarity is that I've seen different churches prioritise young people differently: some where young people are front and centre of ministry and others where they're just little people who will one day grow up to be responsible members of church."

Hannah Moore - leader, Shrewsbury Youth for Christ



A new school being built by the Anglican church in Batam (just south of Singapore) with the overseeing pastor, Revd Henok Hariyanto.



"It was mind-blowing to realise how vast the Province of South East Asia is: three dioceses cover Malaysia and then the Bishop of Singapore said it'll take 12 hours to fly from one tip of his diocese to the other as it comprise seven deaneries, each one a country - Nepal, Cambodia, Laos, Vietnam, Thailand and Indonesia! Equally impressive is the missionary enthusiasm and the intense energy going into reaching people in countries where authorities are hostile to Christian faith. They are asking in Sabah and Indonesia for English-speaking teachers to work in church schools and gently show the love of God through not words but actions."

"The other thing that was fantastic was flying up to Penang and meeting people from St Paul's Church. Just two weeks before we welcomed Peter Ooi, a St Chad's Volunteer from there to my home church. To meet the pastor, Ven Stephen Soe and some of Peter's friends was fabulous - making friends, meeting again past Volunteers who know the places I know and hopefully making and building a connection between those two churches - I'm really looking forward to see that link grow."

Simon Jones - Diocesan Communications Team



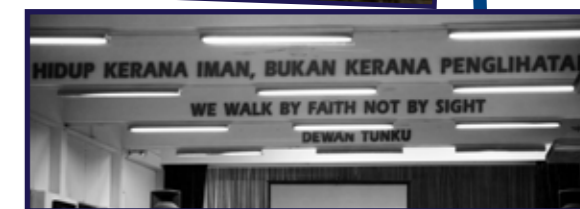
James Chee demonstrating physio equipment at St Mark's Cozy Home (above). Carl on the receiving end of a trainee massage (below).

"I found Cozy Home very interesting. James Chee had a passion for older people and where they would live after retirement - somewhere of a certain standard. He was very direct and said, 'This place will not smell, must be clean...' and he was right. He made sure people are well cared for, food of a high standard, prepared fresh. Bits of that we could take back to my own parish."

"What struck me about St Nicholas Home was also the respect, caring for the blind of all ages. It was wonderful to see how the carers treated the children in the kindergarten - it was like they were their own parents. Adults were learning skills to enable them to live and work - making them computer literate, able to cook, to cook and to do massage. I'm up for anything and they wanted to practice on me - that was wonderful! We saw hosts of bikes, tandems, so they could have the experience and feel of the whole thing."

"When we had lunch at St Paul's church in Petaling Jaya, we were served by people with learning difficulties being helped to become independent. Then they sang for us and I couldn't keep back the emotions - they were so joyous and thankful. For me what undergirded all of that was the respect given to the people in all three cases. It'll really stay with me for life, it really was the Gospel on legs."

Revd Preb Carl Ramsey, vicar of Pelsall



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