

I LOVE TAIWAN MISSION - TAIWAN

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Background

For several years now, Church of Scotland youth representatives have attended the I Love Taiwan Mission Camp. This is an annual event run by the Presbyterian Church in Taiwan. It is both an international and ecumenical event which aims to bring together youth from all over the world in order to share stories of faith and life as well as to build relationships between youth. Another aim of the event is to educate international delegates about Taiwan and its history. Taiwan has a complex political history and it's hard to engage with that history through media alone. Talking to people from Taiwan, people who have lived through events is vitally important in order to gain a real insight into the lives of people living there. There was a large emphasis on mission for the duration of the camp. There was time to think about what mission was as well as time to actively take part in mission projects in local churches across Taiwan.



Activities

All the youth met together at a youth centre in Taipei for a time of orientation. There were approximately 200 youth in total with a large percentage of those people being international delegates. All the youth gathered for three days to learn about the programme, Taiwan and what we would be doing for the following weeks. We were then split into small groups which varied in size. I was put into a group with three other youth. We were all from different countries – Hong Kong, Taiwan, Brazil and Scotland. All the small groups were to be sent to different churches throughout Taiwan. The group I was in did not have to travel far from the youth centre as we were placed in Wun San church, Taipei.



After the first three days, we travelled to our different churches. When I arrived at Wun San church I learnt that the main activity for the next two weeks would be planning and helping with a children's camp. In addition to this we were to attend different fellowship groups and join in with their activities.

One of the first things I noticed about Wun San church was that there were different activities taking place every day of the week. We were always busy and we were introduced to many different groups and people. The church was thriving and had a real community feel to it.

We spent a great deal of time preparing for the children's camp which would run in our second week with the church. This involved writing song words, writing out verses of scripture and preparing the programme. Not being able to speak Mandarin was a slight barrier for this. However, I was still able to be useful as some of the songs that the children learnt were sang in English and the leaders were keen for the children to learn some English so many things were translated. I was also able to help in more practical ways; cutting out, craft, drawing etc. I enjoyed exploring different ways of helping and being continually taken out of my comfort zone.



When we were not preparing for the camp we were attending fellowship groups. I particularly enjoyed the women's fellowship group and the elderly fellowship group. Both groups of people were incredibly friendly and welcoming. We joined both for bible study, singing and fellowship. They were particularly keen for the ILT visitors to teach them songs. I enjoyed the opportunity to share experiences and traditions.

The camp itself was incredibly busy and a lot of fun. It felt somewhat similar to holiday clubs that I have volunteered at back home in Scotland. The main difference was that the camp ran for full days with early starts and late finishes. It was intense and very tiring but I loved every minute of it. I loved helping the children in any way I could and it was a real challenge to explore different ways of doing that. The language barrier caused me to explore other gifts and it forced me to engage with the children in a different and unique way which I could not do back at home. I loved teaching the children some English songs and I loved teaching them games. The children were really enthusiastic and really loved being at the camp. It was really encouraging to see their enthusiasm for Church. The numbers of children attending were also encouraging and it was great that all the leaders were so committed. I really admired that each night ended with a very long and detailed review session. Every aspect of the day was analysed and everyone wanted to ensure that the children had a good time.



When there was any free time we spent a lot of time with the youth group in the Church. They loved showing us around Taipei and they loved teaching us all about Taiwan. I loved learning about Taiwan from them and I loved being able to play, share and learn with them.

Highlights

I encountered so many new things on my trip to Taiwan. I loved experiencing a completely different culture. The people I met were all incredibly friendly. It was very overwhelming to be so welcomed in. I stayed with a house family throughout my time in Taiwan and I think one of the most moving things for me was at the end of the trip when they told me that I was "part of their family". I was welcomed in so quickly and without any hesitation; I was surprised at the friendships I made and I am incredibly grateful for the experiences I had.

It is very difficult to overcome the language barriers that exist. I tried desperately to learn some Mandarin. They were all so patient and very happy to translate. I was so impressed by their language capabilities and how natural it was for them to speak multiple languages. One thing I did learn was that whilst language is important to

building relationships, it's definitely not the only way to do it. You can do it through worship, through song, through laughter and through play.



One memory in particular was when a 14 year old youth, who has Asperger's syndrome, taught me several card games throughout my trip. We laughed a lot and when it was time to go home he told me that he wished that I could come back to Wun San church next year. He was always learning more English so that he could talk to me and he tried to teach me Mandarin. He loved sharing jokes and I was very much encouraged by his enthusiasm, humour and fun.

Lessons learnt

This experience has taught me a lot about the value in sharing. One thing I learnt from Wun San Church was that at the end of every day they would have a time of "sharing" where they would share high points and low points of the day. I found the people I met to be some of the most open and friendly people I have ever met. They involved people at all points in their lives and they love to involve more people in that. The church family seems very close and I was really encouraged by the fact that they seem to meet up throughout the week for dinner and every time that happens, it seems to be a party!

One of the things I was most nervous about was the language barrier. However, I have learnt so much about communication and friendship that I would not hesitate in encouraging anyone who was worried about this to go. If you open yourself to the people there, they will welcome you no matter what. The trip has however, encouraged me to start learning Mandarin so that I can stay in touch with some of the friends that I have made!

