



# Catherine Lee

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**Location:** Taiwan



**What I do:** Working with the Taiwan Episcopal Church, supporting the church, chaplaincy and kindergarten ministry of the Diocese of Taiwan.

Dear friends,

“Let the light of Christ shine... in the darkness of our hearts... in the dark alleys of our cities... in the rejected places within us...”

Today I celebrate 25 years since I first arrived in Taiwan, looking back with great gratitude! Thanks be to God and to all of you – many of you have supported me for all these 25 years, and some of you even longer, back when I first joined CMS in 1989.

It was through the great vision and boundless enthusiasm of Rev Charles C T Chen, along with the kind invitation and encouragement of Taiwan’s late Bishop John C T Chien (followed by Bishop David J H Lai and now Bishop Lennon Y R Chang) and with ongoing support from CMS and you all, that I arrived in Taiwan on Monday 4 January 1999. I was warmly welcomed that day by Charles and his wife, MaryJo, both now 88, their amazing passion for life as strong as ever! We just met again on New Year’s Day here in Taipei and took this photo together, they are such a blessing!



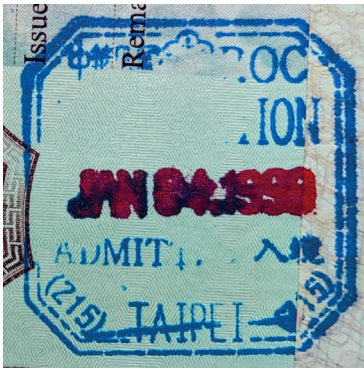
*Rev Charles Chen and MaryJo Chen with me, New Year's Day 2024.*

As I walked in the pouring rain yesterday past some of Taipei’s dark narrow alleys, I was reminded of the above prayer, which I remember being very meaningful when I first arrived in Taiwan all those years ago. I remember the dark days and nights of my first winter in Taiwan, and every winter since – when the rain pours down and the dampness intrudes into every part of life, when the mosquitoes, cockroaches and termites lurk in the dark, damp corners, and when the daily struggle of trying to learn and communicate in a language and culture often seem impossible. The darkness of this world is also much in evidence on our screens as we watch world events unfold, and this month we have the added drama of Taiwan’s presidential election and all the uncertainty that brings. Yet somehow the light of Christ shines through in the meaning and purpose of being here, along with the joys of friends, fellowship, faith and a whole lot of fun.

This Christmas was my first in Taipei City, and with new friends at St John’s Cathedral, so I got together with my neighbours, Rev Joseph Ho and family, and we welcomed different groups each week to

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celebrate with us: from the kindergarten, cathedral youth, student Bible study group, cell groups, families – they all came! Partly, at least, they wanted to see how we had decorated everywhere with blue paper chains made from the leftover Advent Sunday service bulletins, ha ha! Parties involve food, lots of it, plus Chinese tea, coffee and especially choc ices, even in winter. With the students we played games, and I had them all walking round the room roaring like lions and walking like penguins. Ah, parties in the depths of dark, damp December are such fun!

As Christmas Day was a Monday, it was a normal work and school day in Taiwan. Our diocesan office was open, and I was very honoured to be invited by Bishop Chang to join the staff that

morning in the office chapel for their Christmas Day service, and to be godmother to his eight-month-old granddaughter, Ruei-Shi (aka Shiloh) at her baptism held during the service. Baby Shiloh is so gorgeous! And as Bishop Chang was ordained priest in January 1999, so we are both celebrating special 25-year anniversaries this month!

A few days later and I found myself at a care home hosting a 95<sup>th</sup> birthday party for a special friend, the very lovely Mrs Hsu, who with her husband were Presbyterian missionaries from Taiwan to Mauritius in the 1960s–70s. She's now living on Taiwan's bleak NW coast, not far from where I used to live at St John's University, famous for its wet and windy winters, as it was that day too. It was all smiles though that day, especially as I gave Mrs Hsu a party hat to wear with "Little Princess" written on it, which everyone loved, and we livestreamed the party to her family overseas, so they could join the fun too. Turns out that 95 is not so old – of the 14 people there, at least three were older than 95!

And so to New Year's Eve, which we celebrated in central Taipei at the huge outdoor "Taipei Blessing" concert, featuring a choir and orchestra of 450 people performing hymns and songs of faith from all over the world. It was especially moving to hear stunning performances of the Swahili classics "Baba Yetu" and "Yesu Kwetu Ni Rafiki", which brought back so many wonderful memories of East Africa. I am grateful that my 25 years in Taiwan were preceded by seven very formative years in Tanzania; experiences I had there have greatly influenced my life in Taiwan. In a world where success is so much defined by wealth and prosperity, it's not always popular to speak positively of what we may learn from countries like Tanzania, and even less popular to speak up against underlying racism and discrimination that many face in this part of the world, so it's great that these beautiful Swahili songs were included in the concert. Prayer is indeed needed more than ever, to "let the light of Christ shine in the darkness of our hearts, in the dark alleys of our cities, and in the rejected places within us" – and in our world, this new year and forever.

Wishing you all a Happy New Year 2024 and Happy Chinese New Year of the Dragon on 10 February!

Catherine Lee



*Photos from top to bottom: Immigration stamp from my arrival on 4 January 1999; Christmas parties; Christmas Day 2023 – including baby Shiloh's baptism.*



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