
Asian Rural Institute Retreat

Led by Pastors Paul Johnson and Shoko Kitanaka, nineteen strangers from eleven countries arrived at the Asian Rural Institute (ARI) on the 24th of November, 2015. After four days of carrots, farm animals, morning exercises, delicious food, and a lot of singing, we returned to ICU as friends bonded by unforgettable memories.

For most of us, the ARI retreat was more than a field trip to a farm that practiced organic farming. The retreat provided a break from the assiduous schoolwork in ICU. It gave us a new-found appreciation for the food we eat every day. It developed a realization that our faith in God can be applied to everything in life; the meal on our table, the work we do, and the people we meet.

I have two takeaways from the Asian Rural Institute retreat. First is the concept of servant leadership. The speaker of our last morning meeting gave interesting insights. She spoke of humility and the willingness to learn from others, rather than smarts and intelligence, as the more important characteristics of the servant leader. Servant leadership is not just about serving your members through personal servitude. It is more about helping them by giving the members a sense of purpose and fulfillment. A servant leader promotes teamwork, participation, and involvement.

My second takeaway is the philosophy of using the resources you have and adapting to the local environment. For the participants of the 9-month training in ARI, they are always expected to bring home to their local communities the new technology, new techniques, and financial support from Japan. Instead, they come home with only the idea that the local communities already have the needed resources to be successful. It is only a matter of being innovative with the resources and adapting to the local environment.

The unity, camaraderie, and fellowship that we felt in the ARI retreat were truly a boost for the spirit and rest for the soul. Thank you, ICU and ARI.

