

DI CESAN DIGEST

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Leadership Transition - The Bishop-Designate Revd Canon Dr Titus Chung



The Lord Prepared Us - A oneness in working together as a national church



Discipleship in a tough context: Love in action in our Deaneries

CONTENTS

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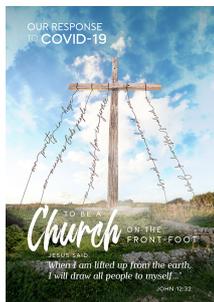
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- 01** Editorial: Digesting In a New World
- 02** From the Bishop's Heart: Church on the Front Foot
- 05** Leadership Transition: Interview with Bishop-Designate Dr Titus Chung

HOW THE LORD PREPARED US

- 07** Celebration of Hope - A preparation for this challenging time
 - A United Body in Christ
 - A testimony of partnership within the Body
- 10** Teaching Article: Five Key Questions on Discipleship by Ps Edmund Chan
- 16** The Bicentennial Christmas Carol Service

THE IMPACT OF COVID-19

- 19** Parish Life during the Season of COVID-19

HOW THE CHURCH RESPONDED

- 22** Combined Pentecost Online Service
- 24** Task Force for Virtual AGM and Listening Room
- 25** Outreach to Migrant Workers: Sowing the Seeds of Love
- 26** My Dorm Our Home Initiative: Who is My Neighbour?
- 28** ALPHA Online
- 30** Testimonies of Personal Evangelism
- 32** Christians in the Marketplace: Interview with Mr Philip Ng
- 34** Anglican Community Services' Fight Against COVID-19
- 38** Anglican Schools
- 42** The Pandemic in the Deaneries
- 50** Testimony from Nepal
- 52** In Memoriam - Revd Sanjeev Sunawar

NEWS

- 53** Making of Deaconesses

Diocesan Digest

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DIGESTING in a New World

BY REVD CANON TERRY WONG



Canon Terry Wong

This has been an amazing season of change and transition at every level.

It has been raised before whether the Diocesan Digest should go online considering that the Anglican flock is scattered all over this city and in the deaneries. COVID-19 has put paid to the idea of another mass publication of Diocesan Digest in paper. We can say that henceforth, we have to maximise digital ways of reaching the flock, although requests for a specific minimal number of hard copies will be considered by the Diocesan office.



Karen Wong

Our [website](#) and [Facebook](#) will continue to carry reports of recent events. However, the Digest seeks to carry insightful stories, in-depth reports and theological reflections. As an issue is released at every Synod, it also carries the Bishop's address, which is also a message in season for the flock.



Lucilla Teoh

I should pause to appreciate the work done by Karen Wong (Diocesan staff) and the superb design work done by the media team at the Cathedral, headed by Joyce Ho. In past issues, Lucilla Teoh (St James' Church) had also regularly contributed in editing.

The team also awaits the diocesan leadership transition and looks forward to the guidance and direction from Bishop-Designate Revd Canon Dr Titus Chung. Rightly so, the Diocesan Digest needs to align with the vision of the Diocesan leadership.



Joyce Ho

This copy of Diocesan Digest will be Bishop Rennis Ponniah's final. The team is grateful for his input, guidance and pastoral oversight.

Meanwhile, we can only pray and anticipate what shape the Digest may take in a "brave new world." Do we need to renew the editorial team? Absolutely. If you care about good writing and would like to participate in envisioning the Digest for a new season or just to give feedback, please contact us at karenwong@anglican.org.sg 📧

Stay safe and walk closely with the Lord.

<https://www.anglican.org.sg/diocesan-digest>



CHURCH ON THE FRONT FOOT

This is a significant moment for the diocese and a moving moment for me. Thanks be to God who has brought us thus far. In mid-September 2020, I will complete my term as Diocesan Bishop and hand over the reins to Bishop-Designate Canon Dr Titus Chung. It is only by God's marvellous grace that we have been able to effect this leadership transition in the midst of an unprecedented crisis of mammoth proportions, namely the COVID-19 pandemic. It has been aptly described as the crisis of our generation, young and old, at this point in time.

CHALLENGED BUT NOT UNDONE

COVID-19 has created massive challenges to both the world and the Church. It is God's RESET button for a world derailed from God's good design and unrelentingly pursuing a rebellious path that will lead mankind to plummet from a cliff to self-destruction (see Mk 5:1-13). At the same time, COVID-19 raises questions about what is quintessential to the nature of the Church - what practices define us as the people of God. The COVID-19 pandemic also searches out the true state of the Church.

For our diocese, both in Singapore and the deaneries, *our Lord has providentially prepared us spiritually* for the challenges of COVID-19. The Celebration of Hope national evangelistic rallies last year gave the churches in Singapore buoyancy and unity in their life and outreach to others. The deans and field councils of our six deanery countries also did very well to keep our churches and ministry points in growth mode. So in the providence of God we were on the upswing when COVID-19 hit us.

This helped us respond with vigour to the restrictions in church life that COVID-19 precautionary and safety measures brought upon us. Most of our churches, barring those in the rural areas of our deaneries, quickly organised online services. We even managed a memorable combined diocesan-wide online service on Pentecost Sunday in May this year. Creativity is also seen in the way churches provided online counselling "rooms", small groups continued to meet on online platforms like Zoom and even the *Holy Spirit Encounter Weekend* in the Alpha Course was improvised under the new constraints. With lockdown and Circuit Breaker measures, more people had more time on hand to engage

in meaningful and reflective conversations. I have been heartened to hear accounts of Christians leading friends and relatives to Christ.

Wonderfully, spontaneous grassroots initiatives by Christian small groups at the outbreak of the COVID-19 crisis brought on *new expressions of empathy and compassion* to the neediest segments in society. In Singapore, these segments include the single elderly, the poor in our one-room rental flats and the migrant workers who play no small role in our land. Going forward, we must sustain these efforts to "remember the poor" (Gal 2:10). This glorifies God and is a tremendous witness to others of the saving and uplifting love of Jesus Christ our Lord.

So COVID-19 conditions can be conducive to renewing the life of the Church. But COVID-19 conditions are *not without dangers to Christian discipleship*. The lack of structure and rhythm to one's week because of the emphasis on staying or working from home, coupled with the convenience of online services and the disruption to physically assembling together, can easily lead to spiritual lethargy and a certain inwardness in orientation. Beloved, we must not neglect physically meeting together whenever there are opportunities to do so (like the approved smaller-scale onsite congregational services) and the necessary precautions can be taken. And we must keep up with our attentive care to those with very real human needs in this hour. This period of gloom and uncertainty is also when people most need the good news of the HOPE that is in Christ Jesus. This is the context for God's mighty harvest.

And for Singapore, we must *keep alive our passion and connectivity to our deanery and overseas mission fields* for God has called us to be "a light to the nations", sometimes code-named Antioch of the East.

To be a diocese that is active in personal evangelism and discipleship while keeping up with our work in deanery and overseas mission, we desperately need the power of the Holy Spirit. *We need to experience the Spirit's empowering presence* each and every day. Only then can we seize the present COVID-19 context for God's mighty harvest. Only then can we keep the front foot forward for Kingdom Advance.

CHURCH ON THE FRONT FOOT

Beloved, we can be a church on the front foot for



our Lord in this time of adversity.

To be a church on the front foot is to **lift the name of Jesus high** in the midst of the encircling gloom (Is 60:1-3, Jn 12:32). I can think of *five important ways* in which we can lift up the name of Jesus and shine His radiant light in our societies: (a) the purity of our lives because of our hope in the Lord's return (1 Jn 3:3); (b) our oneness as the people of God (Jn 17:21); (c) our sacrificial love in serving those in need (Mt 5:16); (d) our exalting the Lord through fervent prayer and praise (Ex 17:10-13, Acts 4:23-31); and (e) our personal sharing of Jesus with others, followed by personal discipleship (Mt 28:18-20). To be on the front foot is to advance the Kingdom of God whatever the situation.

Is it possible for the Church to be always on the front foot? Possible, yes... but unlikely. On this side of eternity, every person and every group is likely to experience times of weakness, times of internal strife, times of being overwhelmed by difficulties and disappointments... times of being on the back foot or actually down and out. Yet God never abandons His people. *The way to get back on the front foot* is to look solely to the Lord, trust in His might and mercy, and use whatever means He provides.

A key provision of God to sustain our vigour and sense of purpose when times are tough and discouraging is the **Word of God**. Let us not neglect feeding on the Word of God nor our practice of weekly common worship or the sacrament of Holy Communion as our churches responsibly make the sacrament available to us within COVID-19 constraints. The Spirit of God takes **the promises of God** that are contained in His word and makes them 'come alive' in our spirit and soul. As we respond to the trials and afflictions of COVID-19 and the difficult adjustments to a changed world, let us remember that we are overcomers through Christ Jesus. No tribulation, distress, pestilence or danger can separate us from the all-conquering and all-providing love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord (cf. Rom 8:37-39). His steadfast love makes us "more than conquerors".

Scripture also teaches that we regain our vision of God by **remembering His mighty deeds**. People of the Diocese, let us rejoice in God and

find new strength as we remember the Lord's mighty deeds for our diocese in the past decade. The Lord has given us good progress along four dimensions:

- The *strengthening of our parish churches* as worshipping and evangelising "communities of disciples". We now have 21,000 persons worshipping in our churches in Singapore and another 12,000 worshipping in our six deaneries..
- The *mainstreaming of our deaneries* so that each one is growing in indigenous leadership, ministry effectiveness and church planting. Our parishes in Singapore are supplying longer-term workers, short-term mission teams and other services to our deaneries.
- The *expansion and harnessing of our educational, medical and community services* in our total witness to the Gospel. The Lord has grown St Andrew's Mission Hospital and Singapore Anglican Community Services to be among the top voluntary social service organisations in the country. Our Anglican schools are also doing well and making a distinctive Christian contribution. And the Lord has opened the door for us to be a major provider of pre-school services, with the morphing of the highly sought St James' Pre-school Services (SJPS) to Anglican Pre-school Services (APS).
- The *role our diocese has played in the unity and faithfulness of the wider church*, both locally in Singapore and internationally in the Communion through the Global South Fellowship of Anglican Churches (GSFA).

Let it be unequivocally said, "This is the Lord's doing and it is marvellous in our eyes" (Ps 118:23). **Glory be to the Lord our God!**

THANKSGIVING WITH A SHOUT OF JOY

Let me finally thank God for **all those who worked so diligently with me** through the eight years of my episcopacy. Some of them have made room for new leaders in earlier years, while three of them (Dr Leong Soon Kai, Dr Gan Cheong Eng and Mrs Chan Siew Cheng) step down from office together with me. As I think of my many co-workers, I think particularly of my Assistant Bishops (Bishop Low Jee King and Bishop Kuan Kim Seng),



Dr Gan Cheong Eng, Chairman of Development Board: **"To God be all the glory!"**



Dr Leong Soon Kai, Chairman of Finance Board: **"I have learned to serve governance with grace and manage compliance with mercy. Friendship is priceless."**



Mrs Chan Siew Cheng, Diocesan Secretary for Schools: **"It has been my privilege to serve and witness God's goodness to our schools and our education mission."**

"No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor power, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creations, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. "

Romans 8:37-39

the senior clergy team, the deans, my Chancellor (Mr Richard Magnus), Standing Committee members as well as my wonderfully supportive diocesan office staff team.

Out of this pool, and from a wider circle, God has given me some **spiritual allies** for life. There are too many to name, but I can visualize their faces as I write. They make me smile

with deep gratitude and appreciation. Spiritual allies are those who themselves earnestly pursue God; they love and trust you, want the best of God for you and they would do everything in their power to help you fulfil your calling. Foremost among my spiritual allies is my beloved wife, Amir. I thank God so much for her and indeed for the wider family, my late parents and my young grandchildren included, all of whom have supported and cheered me on.

Allow me to thank God for **the hidden joys of ministry**. They are hidden because you don't see them at the time you accept God's calling upon your life. But they are joys with an enduring quality. The exhilarating ordination services at the Cathedral, the streams of people coming down the steps of the National Stadium to receive Christ, the warm affection I received as 'father-in Christ' every time I visited the deaneries and the quiet, extended conversations enjoyed with a leader or parishioner - these are the unforgettable moments I take with me. Beloved, the hidden joys of ministry and particularly the deeper experience of God's steadfast love, they far outweigh the costs and hardships of ministry.

So I bless the Lord and lift up a shout of joy as I remember how He faithfully protected me, sustained me, and gave me and our diocese wonderful spiritual victories. People of God, He answers your prayers when you use Psalm 20 every time a diocesan bishop is installed.

"May he grant you (ie. the king or leader) your heart's desire and fulfil all your plans!

May we shout for joy over your salvation,

and in the name of our God set up our banners!

May the LORD fulfil all your petitions!"

Psalm 20:4-5



Chua Lip Wei

PASSING ON THE BATON

I therefore seek your prayers for Bishop-Designate Titus Chung. He will, God willing, be installed as the tenth Bishop of Singapore on 18 October 2020. I wholeheartedly commend him and his wife, Connie, to you. You will find in **Bishop-Designate Titus**

a man with a warm pastoral heart, a theologically well-formed mind, a steady pair of hands and an unassuming style. He has the love of God, the love of God's people, and the love of Kingdom Advance to lead our church forward. The Lord is also surrounding him with a *very good team of senior clergy and diocesan lay leaders*. They lead the Church through uncharted waters.

I step down from office with a grateful and joyful heart. The community of our diocese is a community comprising both Singapore and our deaneries, and it spans different age cohorts of those who serve the Lord and His church. I leave my governing role but I will, in the grace of God, continue to minister under the authority of the new diocesan bishop and support his leadership as best as I can.

Pray for me and Amir as we settle into a new role and a new season in our lives. We thank the Lord for each one of you and the marvellous run we have had over the last eight years. Thank you for your love and support and the joy of serving the Lord together.

The race is not over yet. The Lord is worthy of a Church on the front foot. There is a world to win for Christ. In God's unfailing grace, Amir and I will run alongside you to usher in God's glory on this side of eternity, and finally to assemble with you on the other shore to serve the Lord with eternal praises and unclouded joy!

To the only wise God, inexhaustible in goodness and measureless in power; our faithful Shepherd and King, be all glory, honour and majesty both now and forevermore! He is God with us and for us! Blessed be His name forever!

Warmly in Christ's love,

+ Titus Singapore

INTERVIEW WITH THE BISHOP-DESIGNATE

The Reverend Canon Dr Titus Chung

to be enthroned on 18 October 2020

After eight years as the Bishop of Singapore, the Rt Revd Rennis Ponniah will retire this September, when he turns 65. Synod members voted at an Extraordinary Session of Synod in November 2019, and on 3 February this year, the Provincial House of Bishops appointed the Revd Canon Dr Titus Chung as the tenth Bishop of Singapore.

Revd Canon Dr Titus Chung, 55, is a systematic theologian with a doctorate in philosophy from Edinburgh University, UK. His dissertation was on the Scottish theologian T F Torrance's theory of divine revelation. He is currently the Priest-in-charge of St Andrew's Cathedral Mandarin Congregation and teaches part-time at Trinity Theological College. He is also the Convenor of Continuing Ministerial Education for Clergy & Deaconesses in the diocese, and a member of the Senior Clergy Planning Team. He was ordained in our diocese in 1997, and was the Vicar of the Chapel of the Holy Spirit and Chaplain to St Andrew's Secondary School. He is married to Connie and they have 2 sons in their twenties, Theodore and Thaddeus.

In this special issue of Diocesan Digest, we ask the Bishop-Designate a few pertinent questions:

How do you feel about becoming the next Bishop of Singapore?

Titus Chung: I am humbled and honoured, and feeling the weight of responsibility that comes with the office. I feel humbled because of the trust and confidence the House of Bishops and Synod have in me. In an important way it unfolds and confirms the leading of God in my life and ministry. And I feel honoured because





Bishop-Designate Dr Titus Chung with his wife, Connie, and sons Theodore and Thaddeus in Scotland, summer 2019

I know that I will be well supported and not be alone in this journey, and have been given the privilege to work side by side in service with the faithful, both clergy and lay, who have committed their lives to follow Christ.

To say the weight of responsibility is heavy is in some way superfluous and stating the obvious. The feeling of heaviness, however, is real and our current COVID-19 situation obviously has not made the job any easier. As much as what awaits ahead of us may be tough and challenging, I believe God is faithful to those He has called and as we “draw near to the throne of grace, we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.” (Heb 4:16)

What has shaped you to who you are today?

Titus Chung: It is not easy to pinpoint one or two particular life transforming events. I believe how I have grown to become what I am was gradual and subtle, and the result of small life and spiritual experiences. I would say that the process of learning to be willing to listen has made me less vocal and opinionated, and more ready to give space for discourse and to discern the ways of God in different seasons.

What challenges do you see in the near future for the Anglican Church in Singapore?

Titus Chung: Bp Rennis in one of our casual conversations told me that he hadn’t planned to retire in the midst of a pandemic crisis. Although he was joking, I believe he hit the nail on the head. The challenge we face in the near future is how we can, as the church, recover quick enough from the onslaught and

aftermath of the COVID-19 crisis, and better position ourselves in order to be effective and relevant to a “new” world, where the new normal is not just about a change in life-style but also a shift in mindset and worldview, so that we can be faithful to the call of Great Commission in Matthew 28:16-20.

A lot of reflection and decisions need to be made to face these challenges, and I believe we may have to go back to the basics and fundamentals and prepare to struggle intensively with them before a paradigm shift is possible. We are habitual by nature and are oftentimes fearful of or uncomfortable with the thought of change. If given a choice, most of us would prefer to stay in our comfort-zone. Unfortunately the current crisis leaves us with no choice but to face it squarely if we wish the church to do well in the future. We need wisdom and discernment, and we truly need to seek help from the Holy Spirit.

How do you see our diocese adapting to this VUCA world we are living in?

Titus Chung: You have used an interesting word in the question and “adapting” is precisely what most of us are not very good at. The current COVID-19 crisis, to me, is symptomatic of this VUCA world we are living in. When facing this challenge, we have no choice if we want to be effective in ministry. However uneasy it may be, we have to, and need to, learn to adapt, and I believe we have something important to offer this VUCA world that it does not have --- the absolute Truth.

The key here is how we can be effective and relevant in sharing the absolute Truth of God to a world that is volatile, uncertain, complex, ambiguous and disbelieves in absolutes. What is needed is not just adapting to but also engaging with this VUCA world, and capturing the imagination of new generations. We certainly have a lot to do here and we pray that God’s grace and mercy is sufficient as we put our minds together, and see what sort of Anglican Church we can build in time to come under God’s leading. For this, I covet your prayers! ✠

Bishop-Designate Dr Titus Chung will be consecrated and enthroned as the 10th Bishop of Singapore on Sunday, 18 October 2020, 5pm at St Andrew’s Cathedral.



COH church leaders united in prayer

THE SINGAPORE CHURCH IN THE FACE OF A PANDEMIC

Celebration of Hope (COH) was a city-wide endeavour that sought to unite the Church in Singapore to pray for revival and proclaim the gospel. It was born out of a shared vision by key church leaders, which culminated into six rallies held over three days at the National Stadium and on-going outreaches to the migrant workers in the dormitories.

Emphasising personal evangelism on a mass scale, COH provided training resources through the Andrew Initiative* and produced testimonial videos that garnered over 1.2 million views on Facebook and YouTube.

From 17 to 19 May 2019, 18,000 volunteers from 227 churches came together to host the rallies that led to 2,000 first-time decisions to follow Christ. These rallies were also livestreamed over social media and gathered over 800,000 views. Beyond that, hundreds of volunteers from various churches participated in multiple smaller scale outreaches to Singapore's migrant workers. More than 2,000 workers have since made first-time decisions to follow Christ.

*Andrew Initiative material is available for download at (bit.ly/ANDREWenglish)

A UNITED BODY IN CHRIST

BY REVD LEWIS LEW

(Assistant Executive Secretary of Celebration of Hope Executive Committee)

When COVID-19 became a world-wide pandemic and the nation entered Circuit Breaker mode, church pastors were immediately caught-up with the new demands of taking their respective church services and programmes on-line.

It was a new day for the church. Pastors were all asking, "How can we lead our church members through great uncertainties, when we ourselves have to cope with the pandemic and the new demands of the church?"

This was when the COH WhatsApp chat group came alive! Pastors and leaders who had worked together during the Celebration of Hope harvest events in 2019 re-connected over a common and pressing concern. The previous months of working together with such intensity made the re-connection effortless and expeditious.

Some on the chat group migrated to ZOOM, an on-line app that quickly grew to become the preeminent video conferencing service of choice, so that those who had more on-line savvy could provide consultation to a wider group of pastors and leaders on how to set up an on-line church. From technical support consultations and sharing of best practices, the platform quickly became a valued go-to channel for group prayers and coordinating new initiatives as well.

The unity that Celebration of Hope initiated among our nation's Christian leaders across denominations grew to a new level.

Sharing of Resources and United Prayer

As COVID-19 gripped our nation, beyond participating in LoveSingapore's noontime PraySingapore@12 prayer mobilisation, pastors in the city met weekly over ZOOM to pray and update one another. These meetings birthed a number of new initiatives, either to bless the needy or to address an issue of concern.

A church leader shared his reflection just

before the end of the Circuit Breaker period, "All these would not have been possible, if God has not called us to work together on Celebration of Hope. COH has prepared us for COVID-19!"

2020 - The Year of Personal Discipleship

When the nation was in Circuit Breaker mode and church services were confined within the digital platform, many pastors dropped discipleship as a priority, or viewed it as impossible given the circumstances.

But the Holy Spirit had inspired our national church leaders four years ago to set apart 2020 as The Year of Personal Discipleship. Was there a place for discipleship in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic?

Amazingly, three weeks into the Circuit Breaker, church pastors were reporting a very organic and thrilling phenomenon of discipling relationships taking place in homes.

Parents shared with their pastors how they were spending precious unhurried moments with their children to discuss spiritual matters, share their testimonies and engage in prayers, things that they did not do before. Their children were also opening up, and sharing their views and perspectives about their faith and living the Christian life. Discipleship was taking place at home in the midst of COVID-19.

Pastors and leaders also described how members are intentionally engaged in discipling new and young believers over ZOOM. They are meeting regularly a few times a week to study scriptures, talk about life and pray. And many of these discipling relationships were taking place without nudging from their pastors.

One pastor declared, "This certainly has to be the work of Holy Spirit!" When God ordained 2020 as The Year of Personal Discipleship, He meant for it to come to pass. The Holy Spirit is on the move! Are we ready for more? ✚





A TESTIMONY OF PARTNERSHIP WITHIN THE BODY OF CHRIST

through Celebration of Hope to bless the migrant workers in Singapore

by the Celebration of Hope Migrant Workers Outreach Team

For our team at Celebration of Hope, one of our key focuses was to help unite key stakeholders to strategise and reach out to Singapore's migrant workers and create opportunities for the workers to experience the love of Christ.

We are glad to see Touch International, the Migrant Workers Alliance, the Salvation Army's Sojourn Ministry, SG Care and dormitory owners like Centurion Corporation rally and work together. The key staff of Centurion Corporation are Christians, and they have actively engaged the church to reach workers in their dorms.

Apart from organising appreciation dinners and carnivals, the team ran multiple outreach programmes in the dormitories that saw more than 2,000 workers praying to receive Christ.

Another key initiative involved giving a \$10 Christmas cash gift to 50,000 workers in appreciation for their hard work and contribution to our nation.

The MyMA App was chosen as the platform for distributing this gift. It is a mobile app created by Centurion Corporation, in partnership with the Singapore Ministry of Manpower (MOM), specifically for the migrant workers working in Singapore. It provides the latest news, entertainment, and performs electronic transactions in a secure environment. The app allowed the gift to be channelled directly into the account of the worker based on his FIN number.

With support from our kind donor, we were able to bless and reach 50,000 workers within five weeks of the app's launch. Google Play Store listed MyMA as one of the ten most downloaded apps during the five weeks.

As part of the app implementation, Centurion Corp invested \$1 million to provide low-cost android phones through a tie-up with Starhub, who also offered

better data packages. Some workers brought in phones held together by multiple rubber bands and tapes. Others had screens that were cracked beyond use. It was heartwarming to see the smiles on the workers' faces as they traded in their old phones.

COH contributed to the development of the app and provided feedback for content development. We are thankful that apart from the app's many useful functions, the workers can also access the Jesus Film in their respective native languages.

We praise God for these unique partnerships and opportunities to bless and connect with our migrant worker brothers. Yet, we never imagined that the MyMA app that we helped to launch would rise in its usefulness for such a time as the current COVID-19 pandemic.

On Good Friday, 10 April, the MyMA app became one of the official platforms for information dissemination. This happened when MOM requested all of Singapore's 500,000 migrant workers to download the app to receive direct MOM messages and updates. We are so thankful that God prepared the way for this!✝

\$10 Cash Christmas Gift Redemption Steps:

Step 1

- Download MyMA app
- Register your eWallet
- Activate your account with SMS OTP

Step 2

- Click on "Celebration of Hope Thank You" banner to register for your \$10 Christmas Gift
- Register and Login into your MyMA eWallet

Step 3

- For the first 50,000 Foreign Workers to register, you will receive notification
- S\$10 Christmas Gift * will be credited into your MyMA eWallet on 25th December '19!

*Terms and Conditions apply.

2020

THE YEAR OF DISCIPLESHIP

FIVE DEFINING QUESTIONS ON DISCIPLESHIP

An excerpt of a message presented at
the Diocesan Workers' Communion Service on 18 February 2020

BY REVD EDMUND CHAN
Leadership Mentor of Covenant Evangelical Free Church

At this time, when churches are shut and public meetings are cancelled, and there is a tremendous sense of fear and uncertainty, there is one thing I would say to the Church: Let us not worry about staying alive. Let us live the life.

If we live the life, then we don't pray for victory, we pray from victory - the victory that is a message of hope in the gospel of Jesus Christ, that helps us to live differently because we are disciples of Jesus.

I want to give you here an overview with regards to my thoughts about discipleship. In this framework, I want to share five defining questions.

1. WHY IS DISCIPLESHIP SO IMPORTANT?

It is often said that the world is in trouble and the church is in need.

We say that the world is in trouble because of environmental meltdown, viral pandemics, earthquakes, forest fires, calamities and catastrophes.

And we say that the church is in need for more manpower, more pastors, more missionaries, more facilities, more resources, more finances.

But let us look at things in reverse, and see that the world is in need, and the church is in trouble.

The world is in need of saving. It has a viral infection that is far greater than all the viruses we have ever known. It is infected with the virus of sin against which there is no immunity, no survivors, no hope and no known cure. Its infection rate and fatality rate are 100% of all humanity, and no one is spared from the hopelessness and desperation of the eternal damnation that sin inflicts.

But the blood of Jesus gives us hope. And that is why following Jesus is so crucial, because in Him we have life. Following Jesus is what discipleship is all about.

My interest and excitement in discipleship is a misnomer. I'm excited about Jesus Christ. I am excited about Jesus because left to myself I mess up my life. But Jesus specialises in un-messing the mess in my life. He gave me hope, gave me life, gave me meaning, gave me mission and gave me the whole glorious redemption of the gospel.

Discipleship is so important because the world is in desperate need of this gospel. And the church must live the life that proclaims the gospel. Technological advancements and research inform us, and it is vital to be informed; but if we don't live the life or have the understanding of the power of the gospel, or experience the move of the Holy Spirit, and experience transformation in Him, nothing happens.

We desperately need to come back to the fundamentals of our faith in the light of the Holy Scriptures to follow Jesus. That is why discipleship is so important. Discipleship calls us back to that

which is right at the root of our faith: the gospel of Jesus Christ. And when we are touched and moved and transformed by the gospel, because of the centrality of the cross in the gospel, everything changes.

Without discipleship, we are not just losing our faith or losing our moral compass; and the church is not just losing our spiritual or biblical or moral grounding. We are losing our next generation. That is why the greatest need of the church is Jesus.

Please listen carefully: I did not say the greatest need of the church is discipleship. The greatest need of the church is Jesus.

And if the greatest need of the church is Jesus, because the greatest need of the world and humanity is Jesus, then following Jesus - discipleship - is critical in the life of the church.

What does it mean to follow Jesus? It means to know Him, to love Him, to serve Him and to become more and more like Him. Why is this important? Because it's all about Jesus. It's not about us.

2. IF DISCIPLESHIP IS SO IMPORTANT, WHY IS IT SO NEGLECTED?

Every church would have discipleship in its mission statement somewhere because it is part of the Great Commission. Every Christian leader will say that discipleship is important. So why is it neglected?

There are three ways we neglect something: We neglect something by not doing it, or when we stop doing it, or when we do it wrongly.

May I suggest that while we understand that discipleship is important and we say that we want to disciple, we are doing it wrongly.

Let me give you the evidence, based on over two decades of observations in at least three continents. There are five flaws in the Discipleship Movement:

Flaw #1: Emphasising the outside-in rather than the inside-out

In other words, discipleship is seen as behavioural modification rather than the fundamental change of core values. But if our core values are not changed, nothing is changed.

Behavioural modification is not discipleship.

WITHOUT
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Aligning people to a certain regimentation is not discipleship. We have misunderstood discipleship as a regimental journey rather than a redemptive journey under the cross of Jesus.

We have understood discipleship as "Have you done your Quiet Time? And if you have done your Quiet Time, did you do it at 6am in the morning?" Jump through all the hoops and you are a disciple of Jesus.

This is behavioural modification almost to the point of being a religious pharisaic structure of life rather than inner redemptive change by the power of the gospel of Jesus: the outside-in rather than the transformation from the inside-out.

Flaw #2: Treating discipleship as a programme

Discipleship is not just a programme. We cannot look at discipleship as mere knowledge transfer because knowledge and truth do not change lives. It is truth applied that changes lives. If we look at discipleship as a programme, we neglect the essence of discipleship and of following Jesus altogether.

Flaw #3: Missing the mandate of discipleship

The mission of disciple making is important. Intentional disciples making is in accordance to the Great Commission: Go make disciples.

But the call to make disciples is a call to come under an authority; to come to abide in Him in whom all authority flows, and resides. That is why abiding in Christ, the mandate of being in Him, is the cradle and the foundation for the mission of reproducing disciples. The mission must be cradled by the mandate.

The first call of the Kingdom is not the call to advance the Kingdom. It is to abide in the King so that the Kingdom might advance. Abiding in Christ, remaining in Him, is so crucial for the whole Great Commission of discipling the nations.

If we get all excited – and we should be excited – about discipling the nations, and neglect the mandate of abiding in Jesus; if we emphasise spiritual multiplication and neglect spiritual maturity, or mis-categorise what spiritual maturity is, we compromise our spiritual pilgrimage and our entire spiritual life.

Church attendance is not spiritual maturity. Knowledge, religious zeal, a spiritual office (being a pastor) and spiritual giftedness are not spiritual maturity. When we mis-categorised these things, our discipleship is compromised. We can have the office and exceptional gifting of a spiritual leader but yet be carnal before the Lord.

So our discipleship movement cannot just emphasise mission and multiplication without the mandate and the maturity that results from abiding in Jesus.

Flaw #4: De-linking evangelism from discipleship

Jesus didn't do this. His heart is for the world. When He called his disciples to discipleship, He sent them out to preach, to win the lost.

What do we do? We try to win the lost but don't have time to disciple. Or we get into our discipleship Bible study groups without the intentional focus on winning the lost. We have de-linked discipleship from evangelism, and evangelism from discipleship.

Evangelism is the beginning point of following Jesus because it touches the heart of Jesus. And until and unless we come back with that love for the lost, and understand the theological lostness of the lost, we don't understand the heart of Jesus, and we don't understand true discipleship.

Flaw #5: Marginalising the Holy Spirit

I honestly don't know how to do discipleship and engage in disciple making without the leading of the Holy Ghost. It's fundamental theology.

It comes back to the Triune God reaching out to the lost, redeeming people by the power of the gospel and the Holy Scriptures, and the Holy Spirit transforming us. How can we possibly be transformed to follow Jesus apart from the One whom Jesus said, "I'm not leaving you alone, I'm sending you the Comforter, the Holy Ghost" (John 14:16)?

We need a fresh anointing of the Spirit of the Living God in discipleship.

3. WHAT IS DISCIPLESHIP ALL ABOUT?

Discipleship is really all about following Jesus. He said in Matthew 4:19, "Follow me and I will make you fishers of men."

Does it sound like Jesus is saying, "Follow me and I will give you more work"? If it does, we have missed the point!

There are three aspects to this call to follow Jesus:

A) It is a call to a higher purpose in life.

Jesus did not say, "Follow me and

DISCIPLESHIP CANNOT JUST EMPHASIZE MISSION AND MULTIPLICATION WITHOUT THE MANDATE AND THE MATURITY THAT RESULTS FROM ABIDING IN JESUS.

GOD SHOULD BE THE DEFINING REALITY OF OUR LIVES; AND CULTURE, THE CONTEXT IN WHICH WE LIVE FORTH THE REALITY OF GOD. BUT WE HAVE REVERSED IT.

I will make you successful, or happy, or rich, or a well-adjusted person."

Jesus said, "Follow me and I will transform you to live for something more than mere existence, more than just making a living. You will move from having a career to having a calling, from having an occupation to having a vocation from God. You will move from the mundaneness of life to having a mission for God."

We have to be missional as disciples of Jesus. If we are making disciples in Bible study groups and discipleship groups and we do not give them a sense of mission for the nation, a sense of the heart of God, a sense that there is so much up for grabs in the world today among the nations, if they don't have a missional thrust in their hearts and a missional engagement in their lives then we cannot be true disciples. Once they catch this and are willing to sacrifice everything for this mission, this treasure, then they understand what radical discipleship is, because they become missional in their life and live for a higher purpose.

B) It is a call to a higher reality.

Follow me and I will make you fishers of men. In David Wells' *God in the Waste Land*, he says that for us Christians, God has to be the vision, the culture and the context. But we have reversed it. We have made God the context and culture, our vision.

God should be the defining reality of our lives; and culture, the context in which we live forth the reality of God. But we have reversed it.

Now the culture becomes the defining reality for the Christian and God becomes the context for polite church talk on Sunday mornings; to the point that when Monday rolls around and we have to go back into the world, we don't know how to engage our Christian faith with the world, because God is not our defining reality. Culture is. So the cultural narrative becomes the truth rather than the Word of God as ultimate reality and truth.

We are all searching for meaning in life. Young people in particular are doing so. But you cannot find meaning in the search for meaning. Why? Because meaning is a by-product. It is like happiness or humility. They are by-products of something else. If you try to seek happiness by pursuing happiness, or seek humility by pursuing humility, you can never find it. In the same way, meaning in life, holiness and discipleship are by-products. But by-products of what?

As I search the Scriptures theologically and reflect on life existentially and meaningfully, I realise that you cannot find meaning in meaning. You can only find meaning in ultimate reality.

So what is life's ultimate reality? If we were to interview Jesus today on this question, He will have one answer. It is there in the Scripture and in His preaching. From the beginning to the end of His ministry, and in the post-resurrection teaching of his ministry, for 40 days after He rose from the dead, He taught His disciples one thing – the Kingdom of God. The Kingdom of God is the ultimate reality. And at the heart of this Kingdom is the King. You cannot have a kingdom if there is no king. It all points back to the kingship of Jesus.

What is discipleship all about? It is about the lordship of Jesus Christ as the greater reality and vision for life. I learnt in December 1975, as a young man, that if Jesus is not the Lord of all, He is not Lord at all. Mean business with God. In our lives and in the lives of the people we are helping, help them to mean business with God. Show them, model for them, encourage them. We are not perfect. But God uses imperfect instruments to point people to mean business with Him.

Here is our problem. We dare not make Jesus Lord of All. We are afraid to surrender because we are afraid to lose control. And here is the irony: the reason why we do not want to lose control and therefore surrender to Jesus is that we have the illusion of control.

We don't realise that in reality we do not have control. We do not control tomorrow, we don't know the uncertainties of tomorrow, we don't hold tomorrow. That's why in Singapore, HK and many other places, there is an angst, an existential frustration because of the uncertainties of tomorrow. But here is the thing we DO have: and He says, "Trust me, I am in control." Then the smartest thing to do is to surrender to the one who truly has control. That is what discipleship is all about – Follow Me. Not just to a higher purpose, but to a greater reality .

HERE IS
OUR PROBLEM:
WE DARE NOT MAKE JESUS
LORD OF ALL.

TO TEACH DISCIPLESHIP IS TO TEACH A DEEP RADICAL CHANGE.

C) It is a call to a deeper transformation.

Jesus did not tell His disciples to go straighten out their lives first. If he did, we will be condemned. Doomed. Failures. Because I can't. I want to, I know my own heart. I am a man of tears. My heart resonates with Peter when Jesus asked him, "Do you love Me?" and he said, "Lord, you know I love you.." but I am a mess.

But what did Jesus say? He said, "Follow Me." I will make you. I will transform you. You will have a newness of life, newness of purpose, newness of mission in your life. This is what discipleship is all about.

4. WHAT MAKES DISCIPLESHIP SO DIFFICULT?

Discipleship is so difficult because we have misconceived the Great Commission.

In Matthew 28:18-20, Jesus said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you."

Don't teach them just some things, don't leave out anything, teach them all things that I have commanded you. Is that the Great Commission? No!

Listen quietly again. Jesus didn't say, "teach them all things." He said, "teach them to obey all things that I have commanded you." There is a day-and-night difference between "teaching them all things" and "teaching them to obey all things".

It is already hard to "teach them all things" that God has commanded us. It is even harder to "teach them to obey". How do you teach obedience? The answer is: By loving authority.

To my children I say, "I am your father. I love you. Obey me." "I am your father" is authority. "I love you" is the nature of that authority. "Obey me."

Isn't this what God says to us? "I am your creator. I am your God" - that's authority. "I love you" - that's redemption. "Obey Me."

This redemption flows out of love and gratitude. So we come humbly to say, "Lord, change us so that we can obey you."

But we must determine to change. That's the starting point. Out of the gratitude for the redemption and glory of the Gospel we must be ready to change. There is a huge difference between wanting change and wanting to change.

Let me pause here to give you Five Truths about Change:

Truth #1: People should change. We don't grow by chance but by change.

Truth #2: People can change. God helps us to change.

Truth #3: Bad news: People don't change.

Truth #4: The reason people don't change is because they won't change. Change is a matter of the will.

Truth #5: People short-change change. They change, but they change back from their change.

God knows the human heart. That is why in Jeremiah 4: 1 He says, "If you were to return, O Israel... to me you should return." In Hebrew, the pronoun is emphatic - "to me you should return". And then it says something qualitatively important. "... to me you should return... and do not waver." Return and do not return from your returning. Change, and do not short-change your change. Return and do not waver.

To teach discipleship is to teach a deep radical change, so radical you are planting a stick deep in the ground and you will not move from it. And there are people in the world who have planted their sticks deep in the ground and they will not change from it even in the face of persecution or the threat of death.

5. HOW CAN DISCIPLESHIP BEST BE ACCOMPLISHED?

We accomplish it by discipleship training.

Each year I have the joy and privilege of teaching a Doctorate in Ministry class in New York, where I will ask my doctoral students to do a simple exercise regarding leadership development, which you can also use for discipleship training and development.

Here is the exercise: Design your own training programme, if money and resources were of no hindrance or limit, and you had the best speakers and trainers in the world at your disposal. What would your programme look like?

They usually come up with very impressive programmes. Most of time, they want bring together the best faculty that they know, speakers like Francis Chan, Tim Keller, Ravi Zacharias and others. They will meet once a week, usually for two to three hours, to do assignments covering some core modules and a few electives, and they will do this for two years. And I would shred it, metaphorically, and tell them why their plans won't work.

In the New Testament, they did not have celebrities and renowned instructors of the world - they had Jesus Christ. They did not have a classroom where they met once a week - they met every day. They did not have a core set of curriculum - they had signs and wonders including



raising people from the dead. They did not have studies or assignments - they went on mission trips with Jesus. And they did not have a two-year once a week programme - they had a three-year everyday programme. And at the end of it, all the disciples all ran away!

Do you think your two-year once-a-week programme without Jesus will work? I call this the presumptuousness of leadership development and discipleship training. Why? Because there is a missing link. We rely on our smarts, our resources, our work, our institutions. They are important but they are only the means, and not the delivery system. What is the delivery system? It is at the cross of Jesus.

In the early days of persecution, the disciples were cowards and ran away, but something happened. They were empowered by the Holy Ghost, they were changed in their lives, and then they recognised that these men had been with Jesus (Acts 4:13).

CONCLUSION

I want to end with a story of a 56-year old widow from Surrey, England whose three sons responded to calls to do mission work on the West Solomon Islands. Starting with the oldest, each son responded to the call and the widow readily blessed him, their church commissioned him and he arrived on the West Solomon Islands, only to be killed by the tribal chief and his warriors. Each time, the younger brother responded to the call and took his brother's place, and the widow readily blessed him, and he went, and got killed. When news got back that her third and youngest son suffered the same fate, the pastor visited her and found her in tears. The pastor said, "You had lost your husband, and now all three sons as well. I am so sorry. I can understand your tears." The widow replied, "Pastor, you have misunderstood my tears. I am crying not because my sons are gone. I am crying because I have no more sons to give for the Kingdom of Christ."

THAT IS DISCIPLESHIP.

Bicentennial
and the CATHEDRAL

THE BICENTENNIAL
Christmas
CAROL SERVICE

BY JUNE GWEE

PHOTOS BY EDWIN AROKIYAM

The Singapore Combined Church Choir was an ecumenical choir which represented the breadth of the Church in Singapore which also contributed richly to nation-building. They sang an eclectic mix of carols, hymns and local favourites which moved many hearts.



The skies opened in the afternoon, sending torrents that poured into the night. The Cathedral grounds were soaked but it was also filled with anticipation. White awnings just outside the Nave kept the security gantries dry while security staff waited expectantly. These new additions to the Cathedral grounds underscored the significance of this special evening on 13 December 2019 - the Bicentennial Christmas Carol Service. This was an event organised by the Diocese (Anglican Church) of Singapore and the National Council of Churches of Singapore (NCCS) in partnership with the Oxford and Cambridge Society of Singapore to celebrate Singapore's Bicentennial and the Christmas season, remembering God's blessings and favour on Singapore.

Despite the downpour, the invited guests kept their appointment. Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong, who was the guest-of-honour of this historic service, together with some 800 guests from different faiths, including leaders of major religions in Singapore, government leaders, ambassadors, clergy and lay leaders of Christian denominations celebrate 200 years after Sir Stamford Raffles arrived in Singapore, side-by-side.

Guests were first greeted by the sounds of change ringing church bells. The cascade of sounds were produced by 12 new and restored bells in the bell tower. This is also the first change-ringing peal of 12 in Southeast Asia. Prime Minister Lee made a special visit to the bell loft and saw first-hand the art of change ringing by bell ringers. At the end of the service, he remarked that, hopefully, in 150 to 200 years from now, people will continue to hear the peals of these new bells, be thankful, and remember the bicentennial year 2019.

The service opened with a series of organ preludes which filled the Nave with majestic sounds. The organ has more than 1000 new and restored pipes where the oldest date back to 1861. The main service was divided into two parts. The first part, titled Lessons and Carols, comprised lessons from the bible and traditional

Christmas carols. It was led by the Choir of Sidney Sussex College, Cambridge. The second part on Telling the Singapore Story traced the key turning points of Singapore's developments and blessings Singapore had received. It was led by the Singapore Combined Church Choir. Lesson readings and carols were delivered in various languages: English, Chinese, Tamil, Indonesian, Japanese, Italian, French, Latin, Portuguese, Danish, etc. The beautiful voices that carried the service sang about thanksgiving and hope. They sang of God's promises and reminded that all who

Top: The Choir of Sidney-Sussex College Cambridge, led by Dr David Skinner. Their programme featured traditional carols commonly heard at services in Oxford and Cambridge in the Advent season. Their presence was representative of English contribution to the emergence of Singapore as a city.

Below: Representatives from the organisers of the event flanking Prime Minister Lee and Ho Ching:
 L-R top: Rt Revd Keith Lai (NCCS, Presbyterian) and Rt Revd Chong Chin Chung (NCCS, Methodist), Dato' Paul Supramaniam (Oxford and Cambridge Society), Revd Canon Terry Wong (St Andrew's Cathedral), Dr Ngoei Foong Nghian (NCCS)
 L-R bottom: Rt Revd Terry Kee (President, NCCS, Lutheran), Rt Revd Rennis Ponniah (NCCS, Anglican)





Top left: Religious leaders from various faiths were also invited to the event.

Top middle: Diocesan Bishop Rennis Ponniah, Lutheran Bishop Terry Kee, Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong and Mrs Lee

Top right: Our Bicentennial publications

Above left: The Christus Cantores Children choir led by Dr Joanna Paul added to the music of the evening.

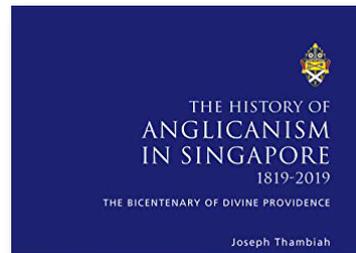
Above right: Invited guests at the reception

had been (and are) part of Singapore, were there not by chance, but by design. Within the Nave, people from different backgrounds, cultures and faiths converged into a single destiny - Singapore.

With each carol, the mood in the Nave was transformed. A symphony of lights in different colours, accompanied the carols. Coordinating with the rhythm and message of each carol, the lights changed from blue to green to yellow. The sound of the heavy rains outside the Nave were muted and forgotten.

After the service, Prime Minister Lee wrote in his Facebook post: 'I hope that 50 and 100 years from now, new generations of worshippers will celebrate Christmas in St Andrew's Cathedral and will once again have many reasons to give thanks for the bountiful blessings that they have received.'

And we hope the same - proclaiming God's promises today, tomorrow, a hundred years later. Little did we know that a few months after this momentous event, the Cathedral will be deserted and silenced. While the church may be "locked down," may the gospel that is proclaimed and sung continue to resound in the city. ✚



Professor Joseph Thambiah and his book, *The History of Anglicanism in Singapore 1819-2019*, was accepted as one of the nation's bicentennial publications and a personal copy was given to Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong on this occasion.



You can read more about the Bicentennial Christmas Carol Service here:

PM Lee 'moved by the beautiful music' at historic Bicentennial Christmas Carols Service

<https://saltandlight.sg/faith/pm-lee-moved-by-the-beautiful-music-at-historic-bicentennial-christmas-carols-service/>

Bicentennial Christmas service at St Andrew's Cathedral joined by 800 of different faiths

<https://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/bicentennial-christmas-service-at-st-andrews-cathedral-joined-by-800-of-different-faiths>



PARISH LIFE

during the Season of COVID-19

“And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.”

Hebrews 10:24-25

BY REVD CANON TERRY WONG

Since her early beginnings in the 19th century, we have no record of St Andrew's Cathedral being closed on Sundays, let alone for successive months. In fact, services cannot be cancelled without prior approval from the Cathedral Chapter¹. Even if there were building works, the congregation will worship at another time slot or in another hall. The same can be said for most of our parishes.

What happened during the Circuit Breaker is unprecedented. As an effective vaccine is at least a year away, how should we “do church”?

One important starting point is to revisit the fundamentals of church life and ministry. It is not simply about going online. Having a good grasp and conviction of these can guide us as we navigate through the unpredictable winds of this season “There is nothing new under the sun,” as the wise man quipped². The repeated patterns in the life of the church can provide some guidance.

An “Ekklesia”

It is good to remind ourselves from our “101” baptism courses that in Greek, the word “church” means “the assembled ones.” That is the central image of the church: she gathers and assembles³. Her primal need to assemble explains the existence of church buildings.

However, for a large part, especially her nascent years, were lived out “spaciously” and sometimes

remotely. The church community was not always gathered in one place or a religious building. As the numbers of Christians were relatively low, especially in areas which were lowly populated, homes and small halls were used. In seasons of persecution, some Christians were determined to meet secretly in homes and catacombs. The latter employs candlelight or fire lamps and we can imagine how poignant it was to speak of light and darkness amidst flickering shadows in these gatherings.

Ink and papyrus enabled remote communication amongst the network of local assemblies. St Paul wrote many letters to give teaching direction, encouragement and to unify the scattered believers. He often spoke about his longing to be with his flock as the physical separation could go on for years. In matters of exigency which required his physical presence, he spoke of being with them “in spirit.”⁴ Even with remote communication, St Paul's presence and influence in these local assemblies were palpable.

Some of these letters were assembled into a

¹ Nature and details of the Chapter is spelled out in Schedule C of the Constitution of the Diocese of Singapore.

² “What has been is what will be, and what has been done is what will be done, and there is nothing new under the sun.” Ecclesiastes 1:9

³ See Acts 2:42-47 and Hebrews 10:24-25

⁴ See 1 Corinthians 5:3, Colossians 2:5

corpus which will become the canonical Scriptures. It is important to note that much of the writings in the New Testament were not hammered out by a group of writers huddled in a room. They are records of remote communication.

The assembling or gathering of believers, whether physically or by remote connections were central to the life of the Church. Persecution and opposition to the church have largely focused on "disassembling" the church and making her "incommunicado". "Stop Christians from gathering, ban the Bibles and silence the pastors" was the dictum of those seeking to eradicate the Church, which still persists today in some parts of the world.

A good starting point for reflection during this almost universal COVID-19 lockdown on church gatherings is to realise that we are not stopped from gathering, worshipping or communicating in other ways. *The freedom of worship remains.* As many churches are saying, "social distancing is not spiritual distancing." In fact, the term "social distancing" may be a misnomer and relational intimacy can still be experienced without physical presence.

Whether it is through old fashioned letter-writing or phone calls or nouveau methods like tele-conferencing or video sharing channels, choices abound. We don't need to be mesmerized by these new forms of communication. They are just tools to serve us.

If we want to, we can still assemble.

When the music fades and all is stripped away

The rich architectural environment of a Cathedral, the grandeur of the Nave which depicts transcendence, and the bellows of the church organ have always been inspiring aids to worship. Kneeling is made comfortable with arm rests and angled cushioned kneelers. The natural light diffusing through the stained-glass windows, sacred objects in the Nave and burned incense⁵ focuses one's attention to worship.

The same can be said for modern contemporary worship buildings. The ambience of a modern worship hall along with the aural experience of singing with hundreds of worshippers is inspiring. There are days when you don't feel like doing anything spiritual. But the power of a beautifully written song and raised hands inspired you to ask, "Why are you downcast, oh my soul?"⁶ Unbeknown to most of us, sound always has a deep impact in



our inner being. Babies spent the first few months of their life with blurred vision, but respond to sound. Sound isn't just about being able to hear. The soundwaves resonate within our entire being. The thumping bass, music and rhythm are familiar sounds of worship reaching deep into our being and moving us to heartfelt worship.

In this season, these sounds and spaces are largely silent. A typical HDB apartment is not exactly conducive for Christian worship. An online Service beamed in through YouTube will not have the same effect. What shall we do?

Again, we look to the past. For a large part of Church life, worship was experienced in austere conditions. Like the proverbial chorus, "When the music fades and all is stripped away..."⁷, worship can be experienced simply. We can still get to the *heart of worship*, which is about the Lord Himself. Praising Him, thanking Him, adoring Him. I recall learning about worship from the Diocesan Lay Training "How to Lead in Worship" (Module 18) when I was serving under Bishop Moses Tay. It can be done in many ways. Even in silence!

The modern city Christian is uncomfortable with silence. Consider how restless we are when nothing is said or sung in a Service. "Be still and know that I am God."⁸ We need to rediscover the "selahs" of the Psalms. Like St Paul, we need to learn "how to abase and how to abound."⁹

The Slow Fade?

"Being still" can be difficult in modern city living. In a highly connected world, the typical Christian struggles with relating to God. Whether it is about being conscious of His presence, praying or reading His Word, daily, our connective energy is spent on something else. We are in a constant state of distraction. The art of concentration is lost in the digital world.¹⁰

⁵ A practice more common in Anglo-Catholic services

⁶ Psalm 43:5

⁷ The Heart of Worship, composed by Matt Redman

⁸ Psalm 46:10

⁹ I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound: everywhere and in all things I am instructed both to be full and be hungry." Philippians 4:12, KJV

¹⁰ See this article in The Guardian: The Loss of Concentration in a Digital World

Whether it is through old fashioned letter-writing or phone calls or nouveau methods like tele-conferencing or video sharing channels, choices abound.

If we want to, we can still assemble.

Some of these digital connections can be detrimental to our mental and spiritual well-being. We often hear people saying how smartphones are distancing and distracting families. Way before this happens, one's walk with God is already deeply affected. This can be so and over a prolonged period, we experience a "slow fade."¹¹

Whether pre, in or post COVID season, our walk with the Lord is at the heart of everything. During the Circuit-Breaker, SaltandLight and Thir.st did a deep dive survey on the emotional and spiritual state of Christians in Singapore. *The biggest takeaway is this: A person's walk with God has a significant, statistically provable impact on how he/she responds to circumstances.*¹²

This circuit breaker or stay at home season can afford us an opportunity to renew our walk with the Lord. While there are less factors demanding your time, it is still in your hands. If you don't take the necessary steps to recalibrate your lifestyle and priorities, nothing will change very much.

One another

I was talking with a leader from another parish and he said "As there are no interactions during online Services, Cell Groups can fill that gap." Many of our parishes have an active small group ministry. We have always imagined their importance in preparation for the day when the Church is persecuted and cannot gather anymore. We have not anticipated being sieged by a virus.

The good news is that small groups ministry can thrive during this season. Christians are drawing closer together through online methods. Many Cell Groups are reporting good attendance and heartfelt participation. In "break-out" rooms, some are having deeper spiritual conversations and personal connections. I have enjoyed immensely and benefitted from one-on-one conversations with my colleagues and lay leaders. Overall, we are less distracted and busy. There is unrushed time and space for relationships to deepen.

Even those in Alpha Online Courses are

¹¹ *Slow Fade*, sung by Casting Crows and written by John Halls.

¹² Quoted in Day 23 of the recent 40 Day Prayer and Fast.



experiencing a rich level of conversations. Ministry during Alpha Holy Spirit Weekend is no less "anointed" as guests are moved by the Spirit.

Is this prolonged season an opportunity for deeper *koinonia* bonds to be formed?

Ministry in the "Parish"

"Doing Church" is not just about worship and fellowship. The closing declaration of the Holy Communion liturgy is "Go in peace to love and serve the Lord." We miss this needful reminder in our Communion liturgy during the Circuit Breaker.

Returning to the Anglican understanding of parish as a geographical term is useful during this period. The parish has always been scattered, if you really think about it.

If you are a health-care worker, your professional ethic should be motivating you to serve on the frontlines. Whatever work you may be doing, we have become more acutely aware of how we are serving the society. Even the call to drive the economy has taken a new urgency as we have become aware that it is a question of basic needs of survival for many. You may be a small piece in the puzzle, but without you being faithful to your vocation or calling, the picture won't come together. COVID-19 has accentuated our sense of vocation and contribution to the whole.

Years ago, a member told me that as most of the working hours of members are spent at work, sermons in church need to relate to these areas. How true. Christians cannot be effective witnesses to the Gospel unless they are first faithful to their vocation.

To be effective as "salt and light", proximity is needed. You are living and working out there in your "parish." Church buildings many be deserted but the parish is very much alive as Christians "go in peace to love and serve the Lord."

Taking Personal Responsibility

We are all still wondering what the "new normal" will be like. The situation is still evolving and unfolding. On the surface, churches are seen as innovating. We are discovering new ways to worship, fellowship and do ministry. However, what we do should be based by timeless principles of two millennial's worth of Church life. And this is even longer if you believe that she started in the Garden of Eden where there was the "first assembly."

Accustomed to worship, prayer, fellowship and ministry driven by physical presence and communal routines, this season forces us to take personal responsibility over these areas.

The admonition in Hebrews 10:24,25 needs to be heeded more than ever. ✚



COMBINED Pentecost SERVICE




LUKAS 24:43-49

☞ DAN LAGI, DALAM NAMA-NYA BERITA TENTANG PERTORATAN DAN PENGAMPUNAN DOSA HARUS DISAMPAIKAN KEPADA SEGALA BANGSA, MULAI DARI YERUSALEM.

☞ KAMU ADALAH SAKSI DARI-SEMIHANYA INI. ☞ DAN AKU AKAN MENGIRIM KEPADAMU APA YANG DIJANJIKAN BAPA-KU. TETAPI KAMU HARUS TINGGAL DI DALAM KOTA INI SAMPAI KAMU DIPERLENGKAPI DENGAN YERUGASAN DARI TEMPAT TINGGAL.

DIOCESE OF SINGAPORE
คริสตจักรแองกลิคันในประเทศไทย



ขอโปรดให้มี
การฟื้นฟูครั้งยิ่งใหญ่
ขอโปรดให้มี
การฟื้นฟูใจในแผ่นดินของเรา
ขอโปรดให้มี
การฟื้นฟูครั้งยิ่งใหญ่
เพื่อให้ ทุกคนที่เรียกนามเยซู
ได้รับความรอด



A church in Thailand watching the online service in Thai



Screenshot from the Gereja Anglikan Indonesia (GAI) version in Bahasa Indonesia

Pentecost Sunday 2020

witnessed history being made as the Rt Revd Rennis Ponniah and the Bishop-Designate Revd Canon Dr Titus Chung led a combined online service across all seven countries in our diocese. The pre-recorded service of morning prayer was also made available in eight different languages on the feast day in which the Church was birthed, when we remember that the Lord poured out His Spirit upon all flesh so that those gathered in Jerusalem said, “we hear them telling in our own tongues the mighty works of God” (Acts 2:11). It was released across Singapore and beyond from 10.30am on Sunday, 31 May 2020, and garnered thousands of views across various streaming and online platforms on the internet.

This historic online gathering was made possible because of the circumstances which arose from Singapore’s COVID-19 pandemic Circuit Breaker period that caused the rapid adoption of technology by the parishes and congregations in the diocese. Over the course of two months, great efforts were made to make sure parishioners had access to the online platforms and media, so that weekly worship services could continue to be held in homes across our diocese.

One highlight of the service was the collaborative effort of multiple worship teams and choirs from different parishes singing from individual homes. These were edited together to form virtual choirs that exuded the joining of hearts and voices to proclaim the praises of God in English, Mandarin and Tamil.

The deaneries also adapted the service into their local languages, interspersing choruses and hymns sung by their local teams in their own languages, while dubbing Bishop Rennis’ sermon into their respective languages for their congregations.

Revd Lewis Lew, who is the Dean of Nepal and Assistant Director of Missions, shared that he

received many reports of deanery congregations who felt very blessed to be included in this service. They felt a deep sense of unity in being part of the larger family of the diocese.

Revd Jacob Vu, the priest leading Church of the True Light in Hanoi, Vietnam, shared a comment that one of his members left on their Facebook page after the service: “I was shocked to see some people, who left us months ago, in our midst on the Pentecost Sunday service. After the song 10,000 Reasons, the Spirit (of God) touched me, showing me who Jesus is. I cried. Then, I felt peace and joy. I received the message and the power of the Spirit. I stopped feeling scared and shamed. I would be a more effective witness of Jesus in the days to come.”

This combined service also reached others beyond the boundaries of our diocese. Raji, a sister from the Diocese of West Malaysia said, “Today’s (combined) service and the songs really touched me. I meditated and prayed, asking God to let me experience once again the power of the Holy Spirit. Suddenly I felt my belly funny (sic) and I found it difficult to breathe. As if my stomach was hindering my breathing. I could feel the Holy Spirit filling me. The experience went on for a while. I shared with my friends that I was so breathlessly drunk. When I was saying grace for lunch I started to cry as I felt the overwhelming love of Jesus. Even now I’m feeling the presence of the Holy Spirit.”

This historic combined service is a wonderful testimony to how in all things, God is working together for good (Romans 8:28).

It was the restrictions imposed on churches that compelled us to embrace and take advantage of technology to continue to connect congregations and parishes. Because of this, we were able to enjoy and experience a worship service across our diocese and beyond, and be reminded that God is continuing to pour out His Spirit and presence upon all flesh! ✚

VIRTUAL ANNUAL GENERAL MEETINGS

Due to the unprecedented COVID-19 pandemic at the beginning of this year, the Standing Committee of the Diocese decided and agreed that all parishes should conduct their Annual General Meetings (AGMs) under Alternative Arrangements, before end of June. The agenda would be pared down to only essential items such as the appointment/election of the respective Wardens and Parochial Church Council (PCC) Members, and the approval of Audited Accounts for year ended 31 Dec 2019 and Budget for year 2021. Also, since it would be a new session of Synod this year, parishes would also need to elect new Synod Lay representatives.



A Virtual AGM Taskforce was formed in early April 2020, chaired by Dr Stanley Lai, Mr Charles Leong, Revd Dr Joshua Sudharman, Revd Koh Hock Soon and Mr Lee Yiew Leng as members. This taskforce gave direction to all parishes via the Resource Panel Representatives from each parish, on how to conduct virtual AGMs, mainly via Zoom Webinar.

The Taskforce saw the completion of all parish AGMs by Sunday, 5 July. We give thanks to the Lord for His guidance to the Taskforce and all parishes, for enabling us to complete the AGMs during these challenging times and in unprecedented circumstances. ✚

THE LISTENING ROOM

The introduction of the Listening Room by St Andrew's Cathedral proved very timely. The COVID-19 pandemic that hit Singapore on 23 January 2020 had quickly escalated from imported cases to local transmission that resulted in the raised DORSCON alert on 7 February from yellow to orange. By mid-March, the church was anticipating a rise in emotional and mental health issues by those adversely impacted by these measures.

Then circuit breaker measures were introduced on 8 April. As expected, this unprecedented situation caused much mental and emotional anguish.

Initiated by Mr Eric Lee, a member of St Andrew's Cathedral's Parochial Church Council (PCC), the concept of the Listening Room was mooted in late March and launched on 17 April after staff and volunteers received basic training from church members who are experienced counsellors.

The Listening Room launched with a two-fold focus on listening and praying. Since then, our volunteers have received many calls, usually regarding stresses from job losses, salary cuts, retrenchment and strained family relationships. Other common issues include struggles of parents with young children working from home, teenagers feeling socially isolated, and senior citizens feeling cooped up.

Even with some recent lifting of circuit breaker restrictions, life has not returned to normal, and the threat of a second wave of infections remains a possibility. What is more, the economy is in recession and strained relationships can linger. The Listening Room will need to remain open.

The Listening Room is run by Cathedral staff Mr Shaun Foo and his team of staff and volunteers. The ministry's advisor counsellors include Cathedral staff Ms Priscilla Chua, and Cathedral members Ms Samantha Lee, Ms Mollie Teoh and Dr Munidasa Winslow. Revd Hambali Leonardi is the Chaplain for this ministry. ✚



OUTREACH TO MIGRANT WORKERS

SOWING SEEDS OF LOVE

BY REVD CANON STEVEN ASIRVATHAM

Chairman of the Singapore Anglican Indian Board and Vicar of Parish of Christ Church



Above: Revd Paul Xavier loading up food for the Ramadan delivery at 2am in the morning.
Left: Brothers enjoying the meals.

There are more than 1,200 factory converted dormitories in Singapore, each housing from five to a thousand guest workers. Anchored by Revd Samuel Gift, the Alliance of Guest Workers Outreach (AGWO) sees the need to reach out to these workers, and has been at the forefront of meeting some of their needs, all the more so during this COVID-19 pandemic. Many of our churches within the Singapore Anglican Indian Board (SAIB) have been partnering AGWO in this ministry.

To date, AGWO has provided a million hot meals, dry rations, and hygiene care packs to more than 12,000 brothers from 267 dormitories. Most of these brothers are either from India or Bangladesh.

During the recent Circuit Breaker lockdown, employers were supposed to provide catered meals to their employees but when we visited the ground we found out that many brothers were not being fed. When we approached the employers, many mentioned that they have been badly hit financially and could not afford to do so. Others were just errant and refused to provide meals for their employees. AGWO works closely with the Ministry of Manpower (MOM) to report these issues.

To make matters worse, most of the caterers who were delivering meals to the brothers prior to the pandemic were now too afraid to enter the dorms for fear of contacting COVID-19. For these reasons AGWO stepped in to provide two hot meals and other essential items.

During the Ramadan season, there was need

for volunteers to drop food packets at 3 am for the Sahur meal. SAIB churches rallied together to deliver food to these dorms.

The Parish of Christ Church, Church of the Epiphany, My Saviour's Church, St Paul's Church, and St John's - St Margaret's Church partnered with AGWO in their Adopt-A-Dorm (AAD) initiative. These churches were given the opportunity to befriend brothers living in the dorms to offer them comfort and support in this difficult time.

There were brothers who were afraid to open up and talk about their struggles. It took a month for one of the Bangladeshi workers to let us know that his employer had not been providing food nor the government aid meant for the workers. He feared that he may lose his job and be repatriated if he spoke up.

Many of the brothers have opened up to us and seeds of love have been sown. They are grateful for the help rendered and the support shown. Many have expressed that they would like to join any activity the churches organise. These churches are now working to provide English classes, and organise games and activities within the dorms.

Following the end of the Circuit Breaker, with the assistance and help of Alpha Singapore, a group of Tamil-speaking churches launched Alpha Tamil to dorm workers. A growing number of workers are joining us for Alpha Tamil through Zoom. We hope to continue this when we move through the different phases after Circuit Breaker.

Please continue to pray for our outreach efforts to the migrant workers. The field is indeed ripe for harvest. ✚

আমার
ডরমিটরি
আমাদের
নিবাস

我的
宿舍

MY
DORM
OUR
HOME

WHO IS MY NEIGHBOUR?

என்
சமூகம்
நம்
வீடு

A Perspective from Project My Dorm Our Home

BY JAMES TAN, Head of Missions Department

MY
DORM
OUR
HOME

Have you recently wondered: Who is my neighbour? And why should I care?

As we examine our current situation in Singapore that is impacted by a game-changing and unprecedented pandemic, this simple yet profound question that Jesus posed in Luke 10 remains very relevant today.

As COVID-19 silently reached Singapore's shores and began spreading in the early months of 2020, migrant worker dormitories became serious hotspots and dominated the national headlines. To flatten the curve, the many thousands of migrant workers in both large purpose-built dorms and factory-converted ones were placed in strict lockdown, along with the rest of Singapore. The workers were to stay in their dorm rooms 24/7, observe safe distancing, and interact only with their immediate roommates.

Instead of a normally-high physical work tempo, the migrant worker was suddenly inactive, left to his own anxieties, insecurities, boredom, and discomfort. Confined to his cramped, spartan and humid room day in and day out, the frequent sight and sounds of ambulances leaving with infected brothers triggered many fears: "Will I be



My Dorm Our Home's interviews with migrant workers

next?" "Will my job in Singapore be secure?" "Can I continue to support my family?"

The migrant worker's situation in the dormitories moved our diocese into action, along with many other Singaporean Christians from different denominations and organisations. There was a growing recognition of the migrant worker as our neighbour, and he needed our help and care.

To this end, one of the diocese's major efforts was Project My Dorm Our Home. The need for safe distancing made frequent in-person contact impossible, but we leveraged social media technology to connect with and care for our migrant worker neighbours.

The basic concept of My Dorm Our Home was to produce culturally distinct video programmes in selected language channels that focused on enhancing the social cohesion and empowerment of the migrant workers confined to their dorm rooms. Through the various shows, workers in one room could interact with the show hosts, as well as workers in other rooms and in other dorms. These programmes were regularly broadcast via social media platforms, and accessed on personal and shared digital devices. For a start, we catered to the Bangladeshi, PRC Chinese and Indian migrant worker audiences, since they formed a sizeable





"When a stranger sojourns with you in your land, you shall not do him wrong. You shall treat the stranger who sojourns with you as the native among you, and you shall love him as yourself, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt: I am the Lord your God." (Leviticus 19:33-34)

portion of the migrant worker population in the dorms.

The Anglican Relief and Development Agency International (ARDA Intl) was appointed the diocese's project manager and co-ordinator.

The Lord guided us in two key ways. The first was to trust Jehovah Jireh. ARDA Intl possessed no organic media production capability. But the Lord provided, by first forming and then steadily widening our network of project partners and professionals. Support and facilitation came from the Ministry of Manpower (MOM), Centurion Corp (a major dormitory operator), business entities, other Christian agencies and our Anglican churches. Through the Anglican Church of Bangladesh, we engaged a media company in Bangladesh to produce our Bengali programme. The Mandarin programme was undertaken by a team of local Christian professionals, while the Tamil programme was developed in both Singapore and a Christian ministry based in Tamil Nadu, India. The generous donation of other Christians provided the installation of some 700 smart TV sets in selected dorm rooms for the workers to watch the shows and engage in the activities and challenges together as roommates.

Second, the Lord also guided us to employ My Dorm Our Home as an instrument for empowering and uplifting our migrant brothers. The process involved coming up with creative ways to give them an active voice and engage in mutual support. The three media programmes frequently challenged the roommates to approach their issues and concerns together as a team, instead of struggling alone as individuals. Each language programme intentionally invited workers to be actively involved in the various segments, such as talk shows, discussion panels, and performances. Some workers even became show co-hosts and facilitators!



The programmes offered our migrant neighbours an interactive platform to authentically share their feelings, views, ideas, talents and cultures with one another. Workers recovering from COVID-19 shared about their experiences and emotions, revealing their initial fears, but also their deep gratitude for the medical care and kindness they received in Singapore. Musically gifted workers, such as Brother Farhan from Bangladesh, uplifted his brethren with his guitar and songs. Others, like Brother Ranjith from India, encouraged his migrant brothers to "fill (their) minds with things that are good", to stay strong together in the dorms and keep their thoughts healthy with reliable news. Brother Rubel, from Bangladesh, thanked kind Singaporeans and the government for their support and encouragement, and exhorted his fellow workers to "be bold and strong, and be thankful in all circumstances".

My Dorm Our Home also gave Singaporean Christians the opportunity to voice their appreciation, gratitude and encouragement to our migrant worker neighbours. Kids, teens and adults from our Anglican churches and other non-Anglican churches penned appreciation messages and composed simple videos.

COVID-19 pandemic has heightened many societal gaps, leadership dilemmas and structural fault lines. For Christians in Singapore, it has also challenged our faith by sharpening our focus on fundamental questions like: "Who is my neighbour?" "And why should I care?" Project My Dorm Our Home was a faith-based response, where we chose to regard the stranger as a native, and embrace the migrant worker as our neighbour.

📌 To submit your Appreciation Messages for our migrant brothers, please email: mydormourhome@gmail.com

📌 To visit Project My Dorm Our Home on Facebook, please go to: <https://www.facebook.com/mydormourhome/>

📌 To view Project My Dorm Our Home's Bengali, Mandarin and Tamil programs, please go to: <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCrEsPFw9M KkOVO Mgp3eg>

Bengali programme discussion panel with migrant workers (and their families)

ALPHA ONLINE

Alpha is a series of interactive sessions where invited guests get to explore the Christian faith. Participants typically gather weekly for eight to twelve weeks for some good food, a short talk and friendly small group conversations to explore questions about life, faith and God.

Touted as a programme that can take place anywhere, Alpha has now added cyberspace to its list of venues that normally included cafes, homes, prisons and schools. Because of the current COVID-19 pandemic-related social restrictions, Alpha Singapore has had to pivot and respond to the need to go digital.

With help from the Alpha National Office in India, Alpha Singapore conducted the Tamil Alpha online training for our Tamil-speaking church community.

"When we were first approached by Project Dorm to run Tamil Alpha Online, we kick-started it by inviting several Tamil-speaking churches to experience Alpha online and take part in our training lab on how to run the online sessions," said Angelic Cheah, Executive Director of Alpha Singapore. "We then connected to the dormitories through the Project Dorm network to invite guests to join Tamil Alpha Online"

"For this first run, we had about 50-60 guests who signed up and joined us online."

Ms Cheah added, "We will be connecting with other dormitory operators to expand Tamil Alpha Online, and kick start Chinese Alpha Online. As always, we will partner with churches to run the sessions and continue the journey with our guests post-Alpha."

For group host Bannu, this was her first experience with Alpha, and she was, at the beginning, very worried about how to minister to the brothers in her group. She shared, "I felt God say to me, 'Just obey and go and I will do the rest.' And He did!"

Group host Edwin was praying hard for God to empower him and co-host Jennifer as they lead their group in the Holy Spirit prayer session. "I was praying, Lord, I can't do this, but I can't escape from this also! Sister Kavita shared with us the visions received by the Tamil Alpha prayer team, and God helped us use bible verses to answer all the questions from our group members. God guided us so smoothly and everything went well."

Alpha participant, brother Kingslin, said, "I was not having a clear understanding on what my salvation really means when I started this Alpha course, but I got more clarity after today's

prayer session. I was burdened with many things from home in India. I just had a talk with my wife before the session about some loan issues and I was worried a lot. The bible verses helped me to understand God's plan for me. God cleared my confusion. I will not worry about anything from now on and will submit myself completely to God's plan."

Brother Kannathasan said, "I learned that God chose me and was with me even before I knew Him. God promises to deliver me and carry me through my life. I am assured that He will protect me and I need not fear for anything."

Brother Chandrabose said, "I tried to limit my God-related activities to just going to church and praying on my own. But I learned that in Matthew 11:30 God says, 'For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.' I asked a lot of questions about this verse and Brother Edwin explained everything clearly."

Group helper Arulkumar from My Saviour's Church said, "This is my first experience with Alpha and I am so encouraged to see Tamil churches collaborating and working together to reach out to the Indian migrant workers. I am looking forward to work amongst the local Indians too!"

He added, "I'm grateful to God for giving me a chance to have a little part to play in this. All glory to Him and thank you, Alpha Singapore. In these difficult times, you have brought different people together. In the breakout rooms, the brothers we ministered to were so open, so hungry to receive more of God's love. This is the right path we are taking!"





“Alpha Online is a new experience for a new normal,” said Revd Thomas Isaac, priest at My Saviour’s Church. “What an experience it has been to work together with churches of different denominations who have come together for the sake of the gospel.

“Such collaboration should actually be the norm, and we have managed to come together to share in proclaiming the gospel. I pray that this fire that has been ignited may continue. Let us keep praying and working on this.” ✠

“In these difficult times, more people are seeking meaning in their lives,” said Ms Cheah. “We are experiencing God’s omnipresence in the digital space. The Holy Spirit is with us and touching the lives of our Alpha guests. Lives are being transformed.

“So far, we are seeing Alpha Online reach more people than ever, in Singapore and outside of Singapore. It is able to draw individuals who are unchurched, and those who would not or could not otherwise attend a physical meeting. It has a retention rate of 100%.

“Alpha Online is also able to connect small groups. With cell leaders taking the lead, church pastors can decentralise and encourage discipleship. It is also able to reach the youths because they are already present and comfortable in digital space.”

“So come join us in one of our Alpha Online Labs, to get equipped and ready to run Alpha online. God is at work, even online!”

AO Labs are now also available in Mandarin. For more information on the AO Labs, please visit: <https://singapore.alpha.org/alphaonlinelabs>

Dear Friends of Alpha,

The Lord’s work is more critical than ever during this challenging period. Alpha has responded to the call. The response to our new online programmes has been very positive. We have reached out to more people in a short time as well as a different demographics within our community; and beyond borders. Our work continues to pivot as we reach out to equip more churches; youth groups; workers in the dormitories; the marriage courses for couples; the parenting courses; and our workplace ministry.

We appeal for your support to continue our work in **Sharing The gift** of eternal life.

Your support goes towards **bringing the love of Christ to the hearts of each one who seeks Him.**

We would like to humbly invite you to support the work of Alpha Singapore by blessing us with a one-time donation of \$600 (or \$50 monthly over 12 months) All contributions go directly into the work of Alpha ministry in Singapore.

Please kindly visit <http://singapore.alpha.org/sharethegift> to indicate your support.

We thank you for your love and generous support. May the Lord bless and keep you!

With Love,
Alpha Singapore



Testimonies of Personal Evangelism



SAM participated in the Alpha Online Zoom Sessions organised by St Andrew’s Cathedral during the circuit breaker. He got to know about it from his bro who is attending the church. His girlfriend is a Christian and he was very keen to explore the faith together with her. Growing up, he had visited several churches in the past, but he had a lot of doubts about Christianity.

“Internally, I would feel very angry, very frustrated when it came to matters or topics about faith. But the Alpha Zoom sessions drastically changed my impression.

“The environment, the discussions were really, really calm and welcoming.”

Sam said he felt very comfortable attending the sessions over Zoom because he could just hide and listen with his camera off. He started out by just being open to listen. After a period of about four weeks, he eventually felt ready and comfortable enough to take the extra step, turn on his computer camera, and come forward.

“I think the Zoom sessions work great for people who are on the go. When I have a very busy working life, and I can’t come down and be around people, I can always just join in. And if you feel nervous, just join the Zoom calls. Turn off your camera, and when you are ready, turn on your camera. You will be fine!”

Through Alpha, Sam learnt that Jesus is a role model for peace. “This is what He advocates. I found that this was common ground for me. I chose to continue to learn more, and I wanted to learn more.”

CHERYL is a single mother of three daughters. She grew up as a Buddhist, but was introduced to the Christian faith about three years ago, after her divorce.

“New people entered my life, prayed for me, bravely

talked about God with me, and gave me Christian books. At that time, I did not understand or know God, and I battled with what I believed.”

One weekend, despite her mental resistance, she felt a strong urge to visit a church. Inexplicably, she found herself getting dressed and driving to a 5.30pm service that an aunt had told her about. There, she experienced God in a special way. He was there beside her, illuminating power, majesty, love and kindness. Her heart filled with gratitude and awe.

During circuit breaker, with gyms closed and fitness classes shut down, Cheryl found herself needing to commit 100% of her income as a fitness instructor to pay for rent. Litigation costs to settle issues raised by her ex-husband added to her financial worries. While sorting through her accounts, she realised that she had monies owed to her by past hirers. She was angry and disappointed that some of these trusted hirers whom she considered friends made excuses and turned their backs on paying her what they owed.

“One night, at 4am, I stood on the balcony in agony. I closed my eyes and prayed to God to show me the way out of this valley.”

Two days later, she received a WhatsApp message from Michelle, a primary school classmate whom she had not spoken to in a long time. It was a prayer from Psalm 61:1-2

Hear my cry, O God
listen to my prayer.
From the ends of the earth I call to you,
I call as my heart grows faint;
lead me to the rock that is higher than I.

MICHELLE, who is from St Hilda’s Church, had asked God who she should pray for that day. She thought of Cheryl and decided to send her an audio prayer. After reconnecting over the phone, Cheryl started joining Michelle’s online cell group meetings. Due to work commitments, Cheryl had never attended cell meetings before, but she found this group to be a safe place to express



herself, ask questions, seek affirmation, and learn about the bible.

With Michelle's help, Cheryl has since organised a Zoom meeting to help other women going through divorce. She has also accepted financial assistance.

"I had so much ego that I rejected help at all costs. I saw it as taking advantage of people. I had to learn to receive grace with open hands, and depend on God instead of myself to ride out of this valley."

"My faith in God is because He knows me and showed me His presence and existence, forgave me when I was angry and rejected Him. He won my heart through the most powerful yet gentle way that I have ever experienced in my life."

CHOON YONG is a youth from Chapel of Christ the Redeemer who became a Christian and joined the church in 2018. His brother Choon Kit was not a Christian but was curious about Jesus, and was exploring documentaries and YouTube videos about the Christian faith since he was 15 years old.

When CCR hosted Alpha in 2019, Choon Yong eagerly invited his parents and brother to attend. They did, but his parents dropped out after the introductory session, and his brother had to enlist into National Service after three weeks.

This year Choon Yong's youth cell group conducted their own Alpha course. It was opportune that the Circuit Breaker kept his brother home on Saturday evenings, which freed him up to join in the cell meetings.

Choon Yong said, "After attending several sessions, Choon Kit came to believe and accept Jesus!

"I'm so thankful that God is a God of promises, and my prayers for my brother's salvation have been answered. I have been holding on to Acts 16:31, which says, 'Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved - you and your household.'

"I am so grateful to God, and to the (church) community that He has given me!"

DANIEL AND CATHERINE, from Chapel of Christ the Redeemer (CCR), have been praying for Daniel's parents' salvation for many years. During and after his father's hospitalisation in May 2019, his parents received multiple visits from CCR's church pastors and members. His mum was very moved by the love she received from the church, and her heart softened.

"The pastor from our Chinese congregation

visited them at their home and shared the gospel in their native Teochew dialect," said Daniel. "Dad, with his dementia, could not fully engage in making the decision to accept Jesus at that point, and Mum had said she would accept Jesus only if Dad accepted Jesus too."

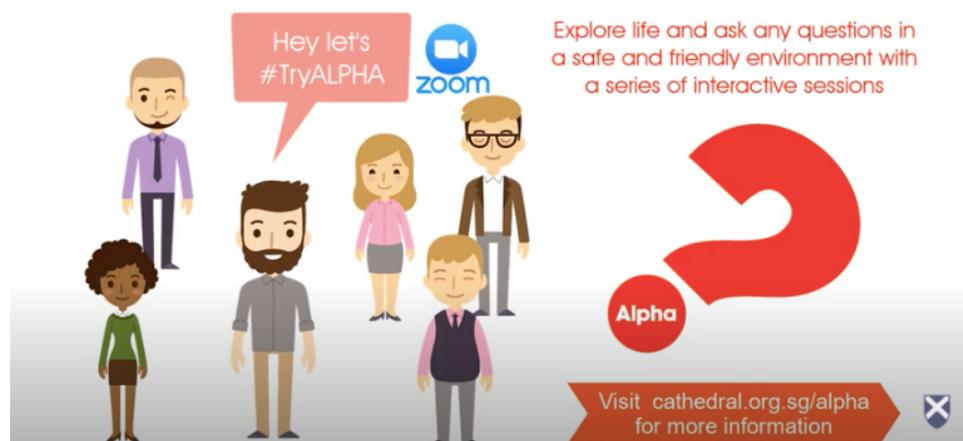
"Recently, dad was waking up every night and refusing to go back to sleep, resulting in both mum and our helper not getting proper rest. We prayed with her each time we visited for God to grant sleep to dad and for peace to reign in mum and in the house. We also asked for prayers from many brothers and sisters for my parents to receive salvation."

During their visit on 27 June, Daniel casually asked his mum if she wanted to accept Jesus and she agreed, so he led her to accept Jesus by saying the sinner's prayer.

"With God by our side, nothing is impossible!" said Daniel. "Everything happened quite easily when we heed the Lord's timing and just let Him lead the way for the salvation of our loved ones."

The family is thankful for their vicar, their Chinese congregation pastor, the senior adults visitation team, their Tuesday prayer group, and the many brothers and sisters who prayed for them.

"Whilst we are joyous about my mother's salvation, we continue to pray for my father and the rest of my family to accept Jesus," said Daniel. "We know and trust that God is faithful and He will answer our prayers in His time. All praise, thanks and glory be to our God." ✝





INTERVIEW WITH PHILIP NG

CEO of Far East Organization and Christian marketplace leader

Mr Philip Ng is a prominent Christian marketplace leader and CEO of Far East Organization - one of Asia's largest property and hospitality groups. In May this year, he gave a talk entitled Kingdom Business: Navigating the Pandemic and the Aftermath. The Zoom conference was organised by the inter-denominational Gatekeepers' Singapore, which drew nearly 900 participants from across Asia, Europe, Africa and the Americas.

In an article that was published on May 14, Christian Leow, Senior Writer for Salt & Light highlighted five ways that Ng viewed the pandemic and how marketplace leaders could respond. Firstly, Ng said that this pandemic is a time to reset how we do business by communicating and valuing the personal relationships we have with the people who work for us. Secondly, it is also a time to plan with prudence by praying and seeking the peace of the Lord, especially in making difficult decisions impacting our businesses and our people. Thirdly, it is a time to act as a community by banding together, helping each other and showing grace. Fourthly, it is a time to pause and reflect by turning our hearts God-ward. And lastly, it is a time to learn from the Tower of Babel by being conscious of whether we have displaced God in our quest to make a name for ourselves, and realising that we are not in control, but God is.

The original article can be found at <https://saltandlight.sg/faith/its-not-us-against-you-its-us-against-the-pandemic-philip-ng-to-worldwide-business-leaders-on-navigating-covid-19/>

The Diocesan Digest interviewed Mr Philip Ng to gain further insight of his perspective and sense of mission:

The article mentioned you saying that this is a time to reset how to do business. Can you share more about this?

Philip Ng: The reset is not about retuning the way we do business or adjusting to the so-called new normal in the way we work because of the coronavirus.

Rather, it is the opportunity, because of the lockdown, to take a pause from the busyness of our everyday work and lives. To have time to reflect and review what really matters in our lives which certainly cannot just be about work and business. To think of our health, our family, our friends and above all, our relationship with God. It is about resetting to be aligned with Jesus.

Jesus tells us in the Gospel according to John 15:4

Remain in Me, as I also remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in Me.

As we do business and go about our daily lives, we must do our utmost to remain in Jesus.

The second aspect is a reminder of Jesus' commandment to us to love one another:

A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another - John 13:34

This reset also involves how we respond to one another, to the needs and situations of our employees, partners in business and our community. How can we show love?

Philip Ng: We are all in the same boat, in the middle of a fierce storm. We are in this crisis together. Every part of the economy is affected. Let us take care of one another as a community. We may compete in business and have business transactions with one another but we are not enemies. We have to look out for one another so that we can recover together. This crisis has taught us that we all have to be safe; otherwise, no one is safe.

What advice do you have for Christian bosses who are non-business owners, such as managers or even employers of domestic helpers?

Philip Ng: Whether we are Christian business owners or Christian leaders operating in the marketplace, we are stewards of the resources, talents and gifts entrusted into our care by the Lord. To respond to the call by the Lord to spread his Word and to touch lives, we must first be very grounded in the Lord Jesus Christ ourselves. We must seek Him and His wisdom daily, pray to Him constantly. Everybody's situation is different and our needs are unique. God knows this and will respond to us if we seek Him with all our heart.

Has this pandemic been a blessing in any way? Have you seen God's hand in all this?

Philip Ng: I have had more time to reflect and review, and more time to seek the Lord in prayer and read His Word. Not being able to go to church, and enjoy communal worship makes this privilege that much more precious. While there are church service podcasts, the participation is not the same. I have also had more time with my children, and the opportunity to share the Word of God with them. I have also found time to read more psalms to soothe my soul and know that our Lord shall deliver us.

The words of Lord Jesus ring constantly:

"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."
- Matthew 11: 28-30

"I have told you these things, so that in Me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world." - John 16:33

God's blessing is that we find peace and joy from the certainty of hope in Jesus Christ. ✝



It is the opportunity, because of the lockdown, to take a pause from the busyness of our everyday work and lives.

To have time to reflect and review what really matters in our lives which certainly cannot just be about work and business.

To think of our health, our family, our friends and above all, our relationship with God.

It is about resetting to be aligned with Jesus.

SERVING WITH LOVE In The Battle Against COVID-19

by the SACS - SAMH Corporate Communications Team

“Let all that you do be done in love.” I Corinthians 16:14.

Driven by love, staff of St Andrew’s Mission Hospital (SAMH) and Singapore Anglican Community Services (SACS) rallied together to continue caring for those under its charge, joining the nation in its battle against COVID-19.



We are grateful to all the staff who have risen to this challenge and for those who have even volunteered. May we always meet the needs of the community!

Responding to the Needs of the Nation

St Andrew’s Community Hospital (SACH) steadfastly came alongside our acute care partner, Changi General Hospital (CGH), and the Ministry of Health to admit patients from acute hospitals who were infected by the COVID-19 virus. As the first community hospital to do this, we were charting new waters.

We converted two of our wards at The Integrated Building, a joint facility between CGH and SACH, for this purpose. We ramped up our infection control training, worked out all the necessary protocols and briefed our staff. Having also received the essential supplies and support from CGH, SACH admitted our first patients on 5 April 2020 which was Palm Sunday.



At the start of Holy Week, SACH started this new service as unto the Lord. We thank Him for this privilege of serving the country.



Providing Solace and Shelter

SACS partnered the Diocese of Singapore to set up a 100-capacity “Safe Sound Sleeping Place” (S3P). This service was set up upon an urgent request from the Ministry of Social and Family Development (MSF).

Located at the Anglican Diocesan Centre at St Andrew’s Village (SAV), S3P@SAV started providing hostel-level temporary shelter from 17 April 2020 to homeless people who have lost their jobs and places of residence during this COVID-19 pandemic.

On 29 April 2020, S3P@SAV hosted a visit by Associate Professor Muhammad Faishal Ibrahim, Senior Parliamentary Secretary (SPS) in the Ministry of Education (MOE) and MSF, and Ms Sun Xueling, SPS of Ministry of Home Affairs and Ministry of National Development.

On behalf of S3P@SAV, Associate Professor Faishal received a donation of reusable masks from Ms Sun, sewn with love by volunteers of a community initiative led by the People’s Association Women’s Integration Network (WIN) Council.

Overcoming the Challenges Together

As measures were tightened due to the evolving situation, SAMH-SACS services had to adapt our day-to-day operations to continue serving our students, clients, and residents.



Responding to COVID-19 related needs, SAMH Clinic (Simei), which is SACH's co-located outpatient clinic, became activated into a Public Health Preparedness Clinic and also started swabbing outpatients suspected to have COVID-19 infections.



With the help of clients like Ms Halimah, staff of Anglican Care Centre (Simei) screen the temperature and travel history of all who visit the Centre.

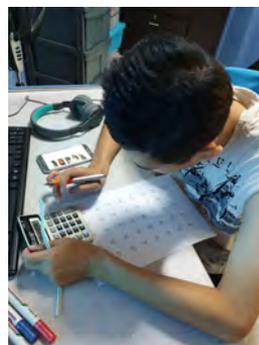
St Andrew's Senior Care (SASC) and Anglican Senior Centre (ASC) (Hillview) introduced live sessions on Google Meet to help clients maintain a routine at home during this stay-home period. Staff connect with clients twice a day, engaging them in online exercises, sing-a-long, games, and reminiscence sessions.



For seniors who are unable to join in for the online sessions, the senior care team reaches out to them by calling them regularly and providing them with paper-based activity packages via mail to keep them active!

Seniors undergoing active rehabilitation are also advised to continue with home exercises as prescribed by their therapists, and encouraged to participate in the online group exercise sessions.

Following the Ministry of Health's directive to restrict all visitation to nursing homes, St Andrew's Nursing Homes (SANH) in Buangkok, Henderson, Queenstown and Taman Jurong helped residents connect with their loved ones via video calls. Volunteers of SANH (Henderson and Queenstown) also engaged residents via video calls, as well as audio and video recordings.



St Andrew's Autism School and Day Activity Centres prepared Home-Based Learning and Home-Based Support materials for their students and clients in swift response to the Ministry of Education's (MOE) advisory.

Anglican Family Centre set up laptops in its conference room with MOE's online teaching lessons to facilitate HBL for our young residents. The centre also conducted online courses such as phonics lessons to enhance their learning.



Staff Appreciation by the Diocese of Singapore

The Rt Revd Rennis Ponniah, Bishop of Singapore and President of SAMH and SACS, together with Venerable Wong Tak Meng, Archdeacon for Community Services, initiated a staff appreciation activity on behalf of the Anglican churches in Singapore, to say thank you to the staff of SAMH, SACS, Good News Community Services, St Andrew's Cathedral Home for the Aged and St Hilda's Community Services for their hard work during the COVID-19 pandemic.



First and second from left:
Dr Arthur Chern and
Bishop Rennis Ponniah



Encouragement from the community

"We give thanks to God always for all of you, constantly mentioning you in our prayers."
- 1 Thessalonians 1:2



Indeed, SAMH-SACS gives thanks to God for the prayers, encouragement and support extended by the community amidst this battle. From the thoughtful cards and messages, to the care packs and food treats - each and every gift was a morale booster, as we press on in love for those we serve.

SANH (Queenstown) was blessed with gifts of ice cream and apple strudel for residents and staff from generous donors. The Achievers - Friends of IMH, a non-profit, non-religious volunteer group, also blessed residents with goodie bags to lift their spirits.

Thanks to Project Makan by YMCA and The Social Kitchen, several needy St Andrew's Autism Centre beneficiaries and their

families are enjoying daily complimentary lunch bentos, sponsored by Si Chuan Dou Hua of Pan Pacific Hotels Group, in collaboration with SHINE Children and Youth Services.

To encourage the care staff and residents of St Andrew's Adult Home (Sengkang), some members from Covenant Evangelical Free Church sponsored care packs for the staff and snacks for the residents.



Generous blessings of care packs and food treats for SACH staff from well-wishers, including Chef-in-Box, Donate A Cookie, ELPIS@Hideout Pte Ltd, Eng & CO LLC, Huawei International Pte Ltd, Prima Pte Ltd, the White Restaurant, Woodlands Evangelical Free Church and Yio Chu Kang Chapel.



We also thank Actxa, Huawei Healing Health Operations, National Council of Social Service, Singapore Hospice Council (SHC), The Ribbon Shop and Zelta 3D Pte Ltd for the donation of surgical masks, face shields and hand

sanitiser. SHC also blessed our SACH palliative care team with love gifts from SHC staff, Kaiser Pharmaceutical(s) Pte Ltd and Pua Loong Trading Co.

We were heartened to receive cards with prayers and messages of love from the community, including youth and children from Bedok Methodist Church, Park View Primary School, SAAS, St Andrew's Community Chapel, Twinklekidz Academy Pte Ltd, and YMCA Student Care Centre (Simei).

Amidst this challenging time, the kindness and generosity of donors who continue to support our work through monetary donations and gifts of love have encouraged us to strive on in serving the needs of the community.

With God's unfailing love as our anchor, and the generous support from the community, SAMH-SACS remains steadfast in this battle against COVID-19, knowing that we are not alone at every step of this journey.





OUR SCHOOLS IN SINGAPORE: FULFILLING THE ANGLICAN EDUCATION MISSION

The Singapore education system is highly centralised, with a clearly defined curriculum and a set of national examinations which helps to serve as benchmarks for student performance at the various school levels.

In 2018, government expenditure on education was approximately \$13.09 billion, with emphasis on infrastructure, teacher development and enhanced pedagogical initiatives to educate the whole child. Much attention has been placed on values and character education as well as citizenship education. These points of focus are a reflection of the government's investment in the human capital of our country, to prepare our young to become self-directed learners and useful members of our society in an increasingly interconnected world.

This education system is highly responsive to changes in the environment brought about by globalisation and technological advances and updates the curriculum and pedagogical approaches in regular cycles. It is useful to note that the government is responsive not only to the changing external environment but also to the changing profile of our students who are more independent, more techno-savvy and more global in their outlook. These differences must be recognised if we are to reach out to them and help them to grow.

The Anglican Education Mission

From the very beginning, Anglican schools in Singapore have worked hand in hand with the Ministry of Education (MOE) to prepare our youths to take their place as good and useful members of

our nation, Singapore. Indeed, the contribution of Anglican schools to education in Singapore began as early as 1842 with the setting up of St. Margaret's School. St Andrew's School was established in 1862, followed by St Hilda's School in 1929, Christ Church Secondary School in 1952, Anglican High School in 1956 and St Andrew's Junior College in 1978. Today, the Anglican Diocese of Singapore has under its purview, 3 primary schools, 5 secondary schools and one junior college.

The national curriculum is implemented in our schools but besides the nurturing of students academically and enabling them to develop their interests and talents, we seek to prepare them to be clear thinking, morally upright and socially responsible leaders who will serve our country with compassion and commitment. The emphasis on moral values, on love for the nation, compassion for the underprivileged, and duty and servanthood, is a clear distinctive of Anglican schools. Indeed, many who graduated from our schools in Singapore went on to make significant contributions in the government, civil service and social sector of our society as a result of the values that were instilled during their student days.

This mission, this ideal of building a stronger society through the nurturing of every individual to maximise his or her potential and gifting, has remained constant over the years but the landscape has changed and the frontiers have been extended. The question we need to ask ourselves in such an environment is how our schools can add value in a system that is internationally recognised as successful in getting the best out of its students.

Enabling Features of Anglican Schools

We are able to identify positive factors that are present in our schools that work together to enable our mission. These are summarised below.

Supporting Structures

The Education Board (EB) in the Anglican Diocese of Singapore oversees and supports the work of our schools. Each school is governed or managed by a Board of Governors (BOG) or School Management Committee (SMC). The chairpersons of these BOGs/SMCs are nominated by the EB and appointed by the Diocesan Bishop. These Boards/Committees ensure that good governance is practised in our schools and that each school's mission receives the support of its stakeholders. Because these BOGs/SMCs work closely with the school leaders, they are able to respond to the schools' needs appropriately and in a timely fashion. In addition, the BOGs/SMCs provide important financial support to students who do not qualify for MOE support and supplement the aid provided by MOE to students who need more help.

The Anglican Schools Committee (ASC) which is formed under the auspices of the EB has, as its members, the principals and chaplains of our schools. This committee schedules regular meetings to allow our school leaders to come together to exchange experiences and share ideas that help them put into practice measures that benefit their students. Diocesan-wide initiatives such as proposals for new programmes are introduced at ASC meetings to allow our schools to know and support the work of the Diocese. Matters such as legal issues affecting students and teachers and student leadership and staff development programmes are discussed at ASC as well. During the Covid-19 outbreak, the ASC meeting in early March 2020 facilitated the sharing of schools' innovative methods of avoiding large group assemblies and gatherings through live-streaming and other means to broadcast lessons and talks. This has proved to be very helpful.

School Leaders

Central to the capacity to provide a strong ethical foundation through our educational programmes is the quality of leadership in our schools. To this end, we are grateful that MOE has recognised our needs and has caused to be posted to our schools competent principals and vice-principals of the Christian faith. More importantly, MOE has been cognizant of the fact that it is important that the persons appointed to lead our schools are practising Christians who understand the ethos and fit well into the culture of our schools. Our schools are blessed to be led by good principals, strong in their faith and dedicated to their education mission.

Pastoral Care and Chaplaincy Work

Moral education and character development form an integral part of the pastoral care programmes in our schools. Besides the individual care that is given to our students to ensure that their intellectual, social, physical and emotional needs are met, we make sure that each student realises the role that he has to play as a member of the society in which he lives and functions. Thus our students are involved in projects that enable them to contribute to the betterment of the lives of those less fortunate than themselves.

Our schools are supported in their pastoral care programmes by various stakeholders and this support may take the form of assistance in the conduct of co-curricular activities, academic help through remedial and tuition classes for those who need them as well as enrichment programmes for the more able students and counselling care for those who need to be set on the right path.

Each school also receives pastoral support from a chaplaincy helmed by a church. The Chaplaincy conducts chapel sessions based on parameters established by EB to ensure that these sessions are in keeping with MOE directives while supporting our education mission. There is provision for parents who are not comfortable about their children attending chapel to opt out. These sessions do not proselytise and generally consist of lessons on how to lead a good life with examples drawn from Christian teaching eg. the story of the Good Samaritan teaches social responsibility not only within one's own community but also across communal lines.

One way in which our students exercise social responsibility is through the Values in Action (VIA) programme which is often facilitated by the Chaplaincy so that chapel sessions are translated into action and intentional learning takes place through their participation in meaningful activities. The aim is that through these experiences, our students will develop a keen social conscience and a passion for public and social service.

The schools and the anchor churches providing chaplaincy services are listed below:

- Anglican High School** - All Saints' Church
- Christ Church Sec School** - Light of Christ Church Woodlands
- St Andrew's Junior School** - Church of the Ascension
- St Andrew's Sec School** - Chapel of the Holy Spirit
- St Andrew's Junior College** - Chapel of the Resurrection
- St Hilda's Primary and St Hilda's Sec School** - Chapel of Christ the Redeemer
- St Margaret's Primary School** - Chapel of Christ the King
- St Margaret's Sec School** - St John's Chapel

The Anglican Character, Thinking and Service (ACTS) Leadership Academy

Building a strong culture of learning and innovation is key to the growth of our schools and essential to our efforts towards imbuing our students with the relevant skills, knowledge, attitudes and dispositions to be leaders of the future and for the future. In order to meet the challenges of the changing social and educational landscape in Singapore, EB set up the Anglican Character Thinking and Service (ACTS) Leadership Academy in 2012 with the intent of nurturing students with a strong social conscience, and who possess 21st century servant leadership competencies to lead and contribute in public service. The ACTS Leadership Academy focuses on the cultivation of the whole person by laying a foundation for intellectual and moral development, and providing opportunities for students to discover their strengths, allowing them to harness their gifts and talents to serve the community.

Since 2012, this initiative has been rolled out gradually to all 9 Anglican schools, with each school adopting a different approach according to its needs while staying true to the aim of equipping students to become servant leaders of exemplary character who are skilled communicators, holistic thinkers and community leaders. Groups of schools have organised and participated in programmes that develop leadership skills in students, giving them opportunities to lead, to collaborate with others, to plan and to make decisions. Participants are exposed to a wide variety of experiences that hone their critical thinking skills, require them to discuss issues and advocate positive changes for improvement.

A staff seminar is organised every other year to provide a platform for teachers to present programmes, pedagogical approaches, and other initiatives that have worked for them. Through such collegial sharing and exchange of professional ideas, teachers are affirmed in their work and gain fresh perspectives in their efforts to raise a new generation of confident youths steeped in positive values gleaned from Christian heritage who will contribute positively to this nation, their home.

Meeting Present and Future Challenges

Our schools have done well in carrying out our education mission thus far. As the world becomes smaller through greater connectivity and as the environment and social norms change, our schools need new responses to these developments to ensure that we continue to fulfil our mission to nurture good people who seek the welfare of their nation.

Fitting into the Global Environment

Anglican schools are well positioned to help our students to meet the needs of the future. MOE's focus on staff development, on the nurturing of students' individual strengths and interests, on helping students to grow their capacity to function well and contribute in a global society are well supported by the structures already present in our schools.

Addressing Sensitivities

Many parents of the Christian faith, including alumni, choose to send their children to Anglican schools because of the Christian ethos of the schools and because they want their children to benefit from the upbringing that they themselves received in a Christian environment. At the same time, Anglican schools continue to attract a large proportion of students of other faiths whose parents value the care and concern that their children receive and the emphasis on developing each child morally and holistically but who also appreciate the schools' sensitivity in preserving a secular common space within the school. This is good. The school is a microcosm of society and have a good mix of Christian and non-Christian students and, also, teachers provide a balance where our youths are exposed to different world views. This experience of interacting in an environment of diversity enriches their educational experience and prepares them well for life beyond school.

MOE has affirmed that mission schools have an important part to play in nation-building. We need to ensure that we continue to play this part by exercising great sensitivity to safeguard the

The ACTS Leadership Academy focuses on the cultivation of the whole person by laying a foundation for intellectual and moral development, and providing opportunities for students to discover their strengths, allowing them to harness their gifts and talents to serve the community.

privileges that have been accorded to us and which are established in tradition.

Imparting Values

Today's students are different from those just a decade ago, and even more different from the teachers who teach them. Their exposure to the world through electronic means is different, their terms of engagement through social media are different and their aspirations through multiple avenues available to them to pursue their talents and interests are also different. Increasingly, their view of the world is shaped largely by what they have access to on the internet and less so by what they are told by the adults at home and in school. Being mindful of the strictures against proselytising, how do our teachers reach these young people who have already made up their minds about what they believe in and what they prefer?

Further, the proportion of Christian students in our schools has risen. They are already familiar with the stories and lessons from Christian teachings and unlike the students of yore, they are less predisposed to accept without question what their teachers and chaplains tell them. How then do we continue to engage them and strengthen the values that they have imbibed earlier in their lives?

This is a question to which we need to direct our attention. Our schools are an important source of values but as our students have become critical, and sometimes cynical thinkers, we need to reach them not through outmoded methods like telling but through providing experiences from which they are able to draw out the lessons we want them to assimilate. Therefore, our teachers and chaplains need to spend less time talking and more time facilitating this experiential learning. In addition, the focus needs to be on getting students to do rather than listen, to take the lead rather than merely follow instructions.

Schools could perhaps leverage on programmes already in place in our schools. One approach could be to appeal to their youthful idealism by engaging them in VIA activities that give them responsibility for planning programmes to help others. As they become more involved in service to others, they become clearer about the Christian value of loving others as themselves and how they can put this value into practice. Applying the thinking principles practised in ACTS, students understand that doing good is not just about feeling for others and feeling good about themselves but that it also requires them to apply their cognitive skills. Through ACTS, critical thinking is employed to look at an issue facing society, identify the factors contributing to the problem, consider the best way to address this situation and decide on the strategies that may be employed with efficacy to improve the

circumstances. Through this, they understand that helping others effectively requires them not just to love their fellow men but also to be purposeful and directed, just as God's goodness to us is founded in His love for us and is also purposeful and directed.

We are in this Together

The responsibility for the attainment of our education mission does not rest on our schools alone. Each of us has a part to play in the success of the Anglican schools in Singapore. Parents contribute their efforts in different ways. Praying parents pray for and with students and parent support groups help teachers to conduct co-curricular activities, accompany students on outings and organise activities to support school functions and celebrations. Alumni contribute time and resources to sponsor school programmes, provide financial support to needy students and offer professional services gratis to the schools. These groups are among those we usually refer to as stakeholders, people with a direct interest in our schools and their activities.

But are these our only stakeholders? Indeed, all Anglicans have a stake in helping our schools to fulfil our education mission. How can we help? Our churches can help to encourage the young people in their congregations to take up teaching as a career and to choose to teach in our schools. They can mobilise their members to conduct tuition classes for students, organise camps where students put the values they have acquired into practice through social enterprise, and provide assistance in running co-curricular activities such as the Boys' Brigade and the Girls' Brigade, both of which have a good track record of promoting in their members strong values based on Christian teaching. Besides contributions in cash and kind, each of us can pray for our schools: pray for schools to be able to retain the privilege to share the word with their community; pray that good Christian principals and more Christian teachers may be posted to our schools; pray for the pastoral care provided by our Chaplains and pray for wisdom in sharing God's word with sensitivity, through word and deed.

"Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful. And pray for us, too, that God may open a door for our message, so that we may proclaim the mystery of Christ, for which I am in chains. Pray that I may proclaim it clearly as I should. Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders; make the most of every opportunity. Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone." - Col 4: 2-6

Education Board

Diocese of Singapore

THE PANDEMIC IN OUR DEANERIES

COVID-19 REPORT FROM THE DEANERY OF CAMBODIA

FROM THE FIELD LEADERSHIP IN CAMBODIA:
Anglican Church of Cambodia ("ACC") - God is ahead of us

Even before China announced the outbreak of COVID-19 in Wuhan, ACC had to do without its Dean in the country between mid-September 2019 and end-February 2020. A mission conference in the US, annual leave and recuperation from a heart bypass surgery kept Revd Steven Seah away. ACC continued without missing a beat, thanks to an experienced clergy team that took good care of their congregations and to Pastor Yos Malina who stepped up to manage the office in the Dean's absence. ACC even went ahead to start a CCOP Chinese congregation in October 2019.

The day before Revd Seah went back to Cambodia, China announced to the world a novel coronavirus had broken out in Wuhan. Within three weeks of that announcement, the Cambodian government closed all schools and banned all religious gatherings until further notice. Like churches around the world, our pastors managed to take their services online, something they had to pick up and adapt to quickly. By the following Sunday, the city congregations were able to hold online services.

Revd Tit Hieng leading worship and bible study in a home in Svay Rieng



Revd Tit Hieng and his team bravely continued their trips to the rural churches to do bible studies in small house groups, and to teach the children, trusting fully in God's protection from the virus. He even learned to post videos of his sermons on Facebook so that Cambodians with smartphones can feed on the Word.

In early April 2020, the Khmer service pastor, Revd Jesse Blaine ended his service with ACC and returned to the United States. Thank God that he had been preparing his assistant, Pastor Pov Morn, to step into his shoes and lead the congregation. The transition has been smooth thus far.

In June 2020, teachers from the learning centre formed small teams to go to the students' homes to teach them English. They have been warmly received by the students' families and are being presented with the added opportunity to reach out to the parents.

We thank God that He had prepared ahead the clergy and senior staff to adapt to the new challenges posed by the pandemic thus far.

GOD'S HAND AT WORK

Both in the city and in the countryside, ACC has conducted one round of food distribution to the poor and needy. In Rokakos where ACC is working



Teaching English to students in their homes in Svay Rieng





Sokheng posing in front of food packages for distribution to the poor in Rokakos in April 2020.



with Eggshell Cambodia to run a daycare centre for vulnerable children, the centre was blessed by the donation of food packages for 34 poor families from a German Charity.

Mark Fetherstonhaugh, Founding Director of Eggshell Cambodia reported, "On the day of the distribution, the village chief said a few words before our staff, Sokheng, was to share the gospel. After he spoke, Sokheng said she didn't need to - the chief had already done it. This Buddhist chief was spreading the gospel of Christ - Amazing!"

Fetherstonhaugh further testified, "I counted 34 food parcels from MCC and verified it when we got there - but we gave one each to 39 families. God still does miracles of multiplication!!!"

Going digital has also not stopped the Holy Spirit from touching lives during an Alpha Chinese Course conducted via ZOOM. Four believers gave their lives to Jesus Christ after the third session. Praise the Lord!

PRAYER REQUESTS

Do include Cambodia as you pray for the pandemic to end, provision for the poor, and the economy's recovery. Here we ask for prayers for ACC and the work that ACC is called to do:

1. For ACC to master the digital platform during this period for a post-COVID environment
2. For the local staff to be flexible and adaptable
3. For ACC to be responsive to the needs around her
4. For easing of travel restrictions that have made entry into Cambodia difficult and expensive -so that our missionaries can come back
5. For more members to rise up to serve

FROM THE DEAN OF CAMBODIA, REVD STEVEN SEAH

There is so much to reflect upon, but I will share only two thoughts.

Firstly, the ban on physical gatherings is forcing us to think about going beyond the church walls to make disciples. Moreover, if safe distancing is to become the new norm, fewer will be able to gather in church than in the past. Bringing people into church will get harder. Going out to the people will become more and more necessary.

However, we are so used to waiting in church for the lost to come to us. There is a real danger we will revert to old ways post COVID-19. Everyone from top to bottom in the church need to keep their focus on "going out" and not return to old ways.

Secondly, we have to think about enlarging the pool of those who will go. It is not enough to have only the missionaries and full-time local staff go. As it is, the pool is too small to reach the multitudes in Cambodia who have yet to hear the gospel. That pool will shrink further if the COVID-19 travel restrictions do not ease sufficiently and if post-COVID funding drops. Giving gifts to attract crowds to attend an evangelistic rally will not be enough. We have to focus on ongoing discipleship of every new believer after each rally. This is really nothing new but the pandemic brings out starkly the urgency of going out and enlarging the pool of disciple-makers among the Cambodians.

Distribution of masks, health drink and food in Pursat.



COVID-19 REPORT FROM THE DEANERY OF INDONESIA

**FROM THE DEAN OF INDONESIA,
REVD DR TIMOTHY CHONG:**

Indonesia has 270 million people, spread out over three time zones and scattered over 6,000 islands. 45% of its population are located in rural areas while 55% are in urban areas.

It is a massive and tough job to govern such a country and to ensure everyone follows the health protocols. There are areas in Indonesia that do not have access to masks. While there are partial lockdowns across Indonesia, there are individuals and groups who are not conforming with the rules. The number of COVID-19 positives continue to climb each day.

The test kits are expensive, not everyone can be tested nor can the poorer population afford to test themselves. In addition, hospitals do not have enough protective gear, as such, frontline medical workers have succumbed to the illness. Also, there are not enough medical equipment for all the regions of Indonesia.



Good News Anglican Church, Sri Gunting, Medan



Church of the Good Shepherd, Batam

have lost their jobs. The Anglican Crisis Relief, Outreach and Support (ACROSS) donated \$15,000 to DOI for relief work. The amount was used to buy basic necessities for these 100 families for 3 months. DOI is still raising funds for the next six months. In view of the current economic situation, we foresee that the number of families needing assistance will increase.

DEANERY OF INDONESIA (DOI) INITIATIVES

All Gereja Anglican Indonesia (GAI) services have been online since early March 2020. The GAI churches are following the Diocese of Singapore's advisory as far as they can.

There are about 100 families from our Anglican churches across Indonesia whose breadwinners

PRAYER POINTERS:

- God's provision for our needy Anglican families.
- God's grace for the Indonesian government as they tackle the pandemic in this vast nation.
- God's empowerment for our Anglican churches to be a blessing to their communities.

COVID-19 REPORT FROM THE DEANERY OF LAOS

From the Dean of Laos, Revd Ian Hadfield:

Laos has only been lightly touched by COVID-19. There have been only 19 cases documented and no deaths, even with a reasonable number of people tested for the disease. Laos does not have a robust health care system and there was great concern about it being quickly overwhelmed if there was a large outbreak. Normally, external workers in ministries in Laos would go to Thailand for any health concerns but with a closed border that would have been impossible.

There have been no new cases of COVID-19 for 50 days now. God has been gracious and generous to His people and the nation of Laos. Pray now that the nation will turn to our sovereign Lord for more of His grace and generosity in Christ.

The ministries in Laos have bravely and wisely adapted to the changes during the lockdown and

now as Laos comes out of the lockdown into what will be the new normal. There have been new opportunities to show practical and helpful love which we pray will change lives for eternity.

Thank you for your prayers for this nation to hear of Christ Jesus. Please keep praying:

Pray for the students of ARDA language centres, the children of Hope Centre, the church members of Church of the Holy Spirit, the people learning a trade at the Skills Centre, the ministry among the villages just north of Vientiane and the work of Christ among the deaf, that Jesus will be lifted before these people and they will be drawn into His salvation.

Pray for more teachers of English and sharers of Jesus as some ARDA language centres need more people to serve. Pray, too, for more money to do more for Christ in this nation.

From specific Deanery of Laos Ministry Areas:

ARDA (Anglican Relief and Development Agency) has four language centres throughout the country. The COVID-19 pandemic caused the closure of these language centres along with schools etc. We praise God that these language centres have reopened, and that the COVID-19 issue caused a number of courses to go online. This has opened further ways of reaching the Lao people with good quality education and with Christ.

HOPE Centre is a ministry of ARDA that offers dormitory living for children who are vulnerable due to poverty, abuse, trafficking, or who are effectively orphaned. COVID-19 has caused more poverty issues, but HOPE Centre has brought the hope of Christ in practical ways by feeding and protecting these children. The care was so well received that poor local families have joined the queues.

"Because of the lockdown in Vientiane last week, we started buying meals for 15 street and slum children for one week, but it was very basic and low nutritious food (canned sardines and dried Wai Wai noodles). Yesterday we started helping families living in the slums as well, who had no savings or income to buy food. Now we are helping the original 15 kids plus an additional 30 children and 36 adults (22 families plus street children).

"This means we are now helping to provide nine meals each to 81 people, for about USD 0.38 per meal. At this rate, for USD500, we can feed 81 people at least 16 survival meals each. Our dilemma is, do we want to feed less people more nutritious meals, or more people less nutritious meals?" - Update by Matt and Lori, who lead

HOPE Centre food distribution in May 2020



Distributing COVID care packages to a village in April 2020



HOPE Centre. They are currently stuck in Thailand, and are trying to run HOPE Centre in Vientiane from there.

Note: Donations from ACROSS, the Deanery of Laos and supporting churches and individuals have provided HOPE Centre with enough money to feed more people with nutritious meals.

CHURCH OF THE HOLY SPIRIT (CHS) has been closed for Sunday meetings but has multiplied its small groups that meet during the week.

"In consultation with a church member who works with the WHO, we purchased 680 bars of soap, (which was far more affordable than handwash and masks) and sent these to a local prison, together with several posters in Lao language, produced by the local WHO to better inform the prisoners and staff about COVID-19 and the steps necessary to prevent its spread." - Update from Revd Tony Paton, Pastor to Church of the Holy Spirit

Care to a Ministry Cluster north of Vientiane

"In the early days of COVID-19, we redirected our Easter budget to purchasing and making COVID care packages for 100 people in a village where we are reaching into. The village head and the people were touched by the effort and very grateful for practical help. Our friends will follow up with this outreach effort in the next few months." - Update from Revd Ian Dierden



COVID-19 REPORT FROM THE DEANERY OF NEPAL



FROM THE FIELD LEADERSHIP IN NEPAL: ANGLICAN CHURCH RELIEF

The Anglican Church in Nepal hears the urgent call from the Lord to care for the poor.

During the nationwide lockdown that was enforced since 24 March, COVID-19 cases surged daily. Beyond the many deaths due to COVID-19, there are many more deaths due to starvation. People are in desperate need to survive their lives and feed their children. Many people are also resorting to taking their own lives during the lockdown due to hunger. According to the Kathmandu Post, over 1,200 people committed suicide during the lockdown.

In early June, the Anglican Church managed to provide food for 405 families. Anglican clergymen and leaders are tirelessly serving communities with food in their hands and love of Christ on their faces and hearts. The people are not only being served with food but have received the love of Christ. There is hardship in life to survive but there is also the river of life-transformation in every community. Nothing can stop the river of love and life from God for transformation.

Our coordinators are finding ways to send relief items door to door. It gives the picture of Jesus Christ the true Servant King who came not to be served, but to serve. An elderly lady had eyes full of tears after receiving food. She had not been able to work for 76 days.

Thank You

God speaks often of the poor and needy. He commands us to give generously to the less fortunate and to speak up on their behalf. To help our brothers and sisters during this pandemic is a form of divine provision. The Anglican Church in Nepal is thankful



to our parishes and donors around the globe for coming together to help our Nepali communities.

PRAYER REQUEST:

Pray that Nepali Christian communities shine the light of Christ in the darkness. Let revival come in Nepal. Let no one die due to starvation.

FROM THE DEAN OF NEPAL, REVD LEWIS LEW:

Many of our members are daily wage workers. When they ran out of income and food, our clergy and pastors sprang into action very quickly to plan and make sure they were taken care of. Vivality, they did this during a brief opening from the lockdown of the country in mid-May. I am incredibly proud of our local leadership. They rose to the occasion to lead their flock during this difficult time.

The lockdown in Nepal started in early February 2020. Churches were not allowed to meet physically. Our clergy and pastors continued their daily prayers, Christian education and services online.

Our churches in Nepal have adapted quite quickly to connecting online. All these would not have been possible before 3G mobile network and smartphones came onto the scene two to three years ago.

The online presence of our churches has created a much broader reach in the nation.

While some nations have reopened their countries or are preparing to, Nepal and most South Asian countries are still grappling with the COVID-19 pandemic. The lack of medical resources, facilities and trained medical personnel to deal with this pandemic is worrying.

- Pray for God’s divine grace and provision, and our ongoing relief work to the poor and needy.
- Pray for the Government – for wisdom and impartiality in treating the affected.
- Pray for the church to continue to stay strong, and shine brightly for Christ.



COVID-19 REPORT FROM THE DEANERY OF THAILAND

FROM THE FIELD LEADERSHIP IN THAILAND:

Thailand imposed a nationwide state of emergency on 3 April 2020, but prior to that, churches were already forbidden from gathering since 18 March. Anglican churches in the cities and provinces scrambled to get their Sunday worship services online. It was a steep technological learning curve for both the staff team who had to produce videos, as well members who had to access the videos online or participate in the Sunday worship via the video conferencing app Zoom.

Amidst the rapid changes, church staff worked hard to maintain contact with their members. Soon, most fellowship activities like cell meetings, discipleship groups and bible studies were conducted online via Zoom or Line. These platforms provided us with a good level of engagement even though we were all in different locations. It was "physical" distancing but not "social" distancing.

In our tribal churches in Omkoi, two or three families would gather together and the youths would lead the worship before watching the pastor's exhortation on the more tech-savvy youth's mobile phones.

In response to the spreading pandemic and uncertainties, churches organised weekly and even daily online prayer meetings, which are still ongoing. It was a time of intercession for the nation and for people affected by the virus. Facing a shortage of face masks, church members in Banchang sewed fabric masks. They are also planting vegetables to distribute to the community.

Learning from the experience of the 1997 economic crisis, where the Anglican Church in Thailand (ACT) started a crisis-relief fund to help affected church members, Revd Canon Yee Ching Wah, the Dean of Thailand revived the programme for this current crisis. To date, nearly THB650,000 (SG\$28,000) has been raised, of which 2/3 was raised locally to provide church members with financial and food aid. In all, 88 individuals from 26 families received assistance through this COVID-19 fund.



Beam and her mother

Mrs Somsri Charoensap from Lat Krabang Anglican Church shared, "I have received tremendous help and support from the church during this troublesome time. I am thankful that you have helped my family be at ease, have less worry, and provide my family with a better life than before. If I hadn't received any support from God and the church, my family and I would

be in severe distress. May the Lord love and care for us until the end of time. Amen."

Mrs Nong Wut-Thaisong from Christ Church Banchang is also grateful to God for His help through the church. "I was an employee of a food shop, but I have become unemployed because my employer can't hire.

"First, I applied for COVID-19 relief from the government. The government agency asked for the real name of the employer but my employer refused to give it. At that time, the only thing I could do was to pray. With an unemployed younger brother and grandson, the household expenses had increased. But no income.

"Thank God that the church responded and I qualified for assistance, including rice, dry food, personal necessities and household items. The ways that God helped me through the church are so great. I saw a lot of God's love. God has always taken care of me and my family through the church."

Before the pandemic, ACT leaders would meet twice a year for our bi-annual ACT staff training. With the onset of this pandemic, the Dean has been organising weekly Zoom meetings with all the ACT church and ministry leaders to update each other on their ministries and encourage one another. The crisis has brought about a greater sense of oneness and family.

FROM THE DEAN OF THAILAND, REVD CANON YEE CHING WAH

I flew back from Thailand on 13 January not knowing then that it would be the last visit for a long time to come. Although Thailand detected its first imported case on 13 January, public awareness of the seriousness of this virus only hit home in early March when a big cluster of local transmissions spread through a Thai boxing event in Bangkok. Around that time, many Thai workers returned from South Korea, which was grappling with the virus outbreak then.

The challenge of the ACT churches in this early stage was to equip our staff to educate our members and to reinforce the government's directives on personal hygiene and social responsibility. ACT formed a COVID-19 Task Force to track the development and to advise churches and staff. On 17 March, the authority announced the suspension of social gatherings, including religious worship.



Mrs Somsri Charoensap and her son



Mrs Nong Wut-Thaisong and her daughter

A new challenge presented itself. Not all our churches were media savvy nor IT-ready. Within a short week, staff stepped up with a variety of responses. Where home visitations were still possible, staff led worship in small home groups and equipped members to go online. These preparations were crucial. It enabled members to continue to worship and meet online when movement became restricted.

Responses of the staff to the crisis revealed some interesting observations. Some staff became busier while some became less so. The former are those who seized opportunities, and possibilities opened up for them through electronic means because of their passion for God and people. Their reach became wider than before.

On the other hand, those who were more passive and had not built up relationships during normal time found it difficult to adjust to pastoring through the digital media.

Overall, the crisis has been advantageous in some areas. Staff across the country could meet weekly online with each other and with the Dean. Staff found it convenient to share recorded teachings between churches. They also found it easier to invite friends to visit online services.

On the other hand, the pandemic has prevented ACT from holding a very important Strategic Planning Retreat, a gathering which cannot be

replaced virtually. Close to half of the current staff joined ACT only in the last seven years. Two theological students have completed their studies and joined the team full-time. Two more are in their first year in bible college. Two others will begin full-time training in the coming academic year. The Strategic Planning Retreat was meant for the staff, old and new, to seek God together for His direction for the next 15 to 20 years; to own the vision together and to commit to the sacrifice necessary to see God's kingdom advance through the church.

PRAYER POINTERS

- 1 For God's people and the church's mission to continue unhindered through love and creative means.
- 2 For support and help for members in financial difficulties, that the church would emerge stronger, bound by the love of Christ.
- 3 For the safety and courage of staff and missionaries as they continue to minister.
- 4 For anticipation to heighten, as people long for a re-gathering to worship and break bread together.
- 5 For the new vicar of Christ Church Bangkok and his family to obtain travel visas from UK as soon as possible.

COVID-19 REPORT FROM THE DEANERY OF VIETNAM

FROM THE DEAN OF VIETNAM, REVD JOHN LIN

Vietnam lockdown

When COVID-19 first hit the country, Vietnam swiftly and decisively went into lockdown, closing her borders and schools and banning mass gatherings. It was not difficult to get everyone to start wearing masks because this was already second-nature for the millions of motorcycle riders who wear masks every day.

Field leadership response

With religious gatherings banned during lockdown, Revd Nguyen Hong Chi, Revd Jacob Vu and their respective lay leadership teams responded well and sprang into action strategically. Both Church of the True Light in Hanoi and Church of Christ Our Hope in Ho Chi Minh City began livestreaming Sunday church services from 22 March.

The livestreaming was a special blessing for those who cannot attend church due to family objections and for our new congregation plant at Halong City tuning in to Hanoi church service. A member said, "We are thankful to our pastor for

his hard work to create opportunities for all who are far away to join in worshipping God. We are filled with the Holy Spirit even at home today."

The clergy also conducted several weekly online Bible studies. Spiritual life remained good and uplifting as God's people gathered over Zoom in joyous whole-hearted worship of God.

A church member shared, "Since the beginning of 2020, everyone is talking about this coronavirus. Instead of talking about it like the others, we are talking about God, praising Him and together, confessing before Him."

Revd Jacob Vu was excited for evangelism at Church of the True Light, Hanoi. He said, "I believe this is a great time for us to share the gospel with our loved ones who have never been to church."

Revd Nguyen Hong Chi (Church of Christ our Hope, Ho Chi Minh) shared, "Our Prayer Chamber Online on Viber and Sunday services on Zoom proved necessary and helpful during the lockdown period. More people joined our PCO and went online on Sunday to worship with us."

But of course, many members longed for physical fellowship and community praise together again.

We thank the Lord for his mercy and grace that the COVID-19 virus was well-contained. The nationwide lockdown was lifted on 23 April. But by then, the economic impact was great as thousands had lost their jobs or had salaries substantially reduced.

Impact of COVID-19 on both churches

The nation-wide school closure greatly affected Abba English Centre, our educational outreach platform in Hanoi. We were not prepared to conduct home-based learning and we saw a great reduction in revenue income.

Many church members and their families are facing personal financial difficulties due to job loss and reduced income. With this economic impact and also with internet banking not prevalent at Vietnam yet, church tithing and offering has dropped significantly. The Deanery of Vietnam is rendering support for staff salaries and help for the community's poor.

Helping communities in need

During this pandemic, both churches reached out to the poor and needy. Revd Jacob Vu led a church team to a leprosy village in Chi Linh City and gave love gifts to 110 people.

At Ho Chi Minh City, Revd Hong Chi organised outreaches to the poor and needy families around the church neighbourhood with gifts of rice and monetary allowances for daily sustenance. Pastor Chi shared, "I am grateful for the help from the deanery for this charity work. I think it will be very encouraging and necessary for the church people and poor people around us. I feel very sad for them."

THANKSGIVING AND PRAYERS

- With the lockdown lifted, physical church services resumed on 2 May. It was a joy to celebrate Holy Communion together again, especially during the diocesan Combined Pentecost Sunday Service on 31 May.
- Pray for those who have lost their jobs to have their jobs restored or salaries reinstated.
- Pray for a steadfast trust in God and a firm security in Jesus Christ.
- Pray for many opportunities to proclaim the good news of the gospel and the eternal hope in Jesus Christ to the many Vietnamese people who are struggling.



Top: Distribution of food to a village at Chi Linh City by Church of the True Light, Hanoi

Above: Distribution of rice to needy families in the neighbourhood around Church of Christ Our Hope, Ho Chi Minh City

THE POWERFUL AND PERSONAL HAND OF GOD

A testimony by Vasanthi and Sandrabose,
members of the Parish of Christ Church and missionaries to Nepal

We left Singapore for Nepal in February 2020, not knowing what lay ahead of us. We settled down in Pokhara, and supported a new church plant, Christ Church Pokhara, to reach out to the local community. Opportunities arose for us to help with the free tuition programme, children's ministry, youth ministry, preaching and helping in a kindergarten for children from poor families. We felt blessed to represent the Parish of Christ Church to do outreach in Nepal.

But by mid-March, we got a call from Revd Lewis Lew, the Dean of Nepal, to ask us to take the next direct flight back to Singapore because of the COVID-19 situation. In the midst of making these arrangements, countries locked down their borders and our flight was changed four times within that week.

At home in Pokhara, we ran out of cooking gas and we had to get a new cylinder of gas. We didn't know, but God knew what lay ahead for us and the lockdown that was to come. It was timely that we got enough supply of gas a few days before the lockdown to last the months ahead.

When we finally thought things were settling with our flight booked for 23 March, the Nepali Prime Minister announced on 20 March the closure of the international airport from 22 March, and the cancellation of all flights. We knew at that moment that God had a plan and wanted us to stay in Pokhara for that time.

That same day, we received an email from a friend and mentor. Although she was unaware of our situation in Nepal, she quoted Isaiah 26:3



and wrote, "It's not your circumstance, but how you think about them, that robs you of peace. Focusing on your circumstances just causes more anxiety, because circumstances change and often spin out of your control. However, God never changes and nothing ever spins out of His control." God knew I needed to hear that.

With the airport closed indefinitely, we had to buy groceries and water. After church on 21 March, the bus we took to the supermarket happened to stop right outside the internet subscription renewal office, which prompted us to go ahead and renew our internet

subscription even though the expiry was still a week away. Little did we realise that a lockdown was imminent and we would not have been able to renew it the following week.

On 22 March, we decided to settle our visa that was expiring on 24 March. We renewed it for a period of two weeks, trusting that we would be able to leave Nepal by 8 April. Little did we know that the visa office would close indefinitely from 23 March. God truly looked into the details of our lives.

On the morning of 23 March, we decided that we needed to buy some perishables, because we had cleared out the kitchen thinking we were leaving. That evening, the Prime Minister announced that the country was going into lockdown from 6am the next morning. Thank God we had bought what we needed.

On 24 March, the Singapore High Commission called to say that there were no plans for a flight to Singapore and that they would keep us updated.



We had mixed emotions but we knew God was Sovereign over all.

On 25 March, I woke up in the night and realised that we would not have enough drinking water to last through the lockdown. As I prayed, God reminded me about Elijah and reassured me that He will always provide for us. At 7 am the next morning, we heard a boy outside our house shouting, "Water, water, do you want water?" We had water delivered to our doorstep!

God truly provided what we needed. When Bose finished his supply of medication, God led us to the only pharmacy that was open and miraculously, it had the exact medicine we needed. We love eating bread but did not think we would be able to find any during the lockdown. Yet, we found a shop that we had never seen before near our home that bakes fresh bread. And even though all the shops were closed and there was no transport available, we were able to get fresh groceries and fruit every day from sources near our home. While others said they could not get many things, we always had more than what we required. He had provided us a home in an area where we lacked nothing.

When we realised that there were families going hungry because of the lockdown, we were able to donate rice, oil and dhal. It was such a blessing to be able to help others who were in need.

On 1 April, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs called to say that there would not be any rescue flights from Singapore. Any rescue flights from Thailand or Malaysia may involve a 14-day quarantine in that country. We prayed and decided that we would stay on in Pokhara unless God provided us a direct flight to Singapore.

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I realised that it would take a miracle to get us back to Singapore. I surrendered to God my desire to return to Singapore and submitted myself to His will. We listened to Bishop Rennis' Ash Wednesday message on Psalm 91 and that was my meditation each day. Whenever I felt anxious, I reminded myself that as I dwell in the shelter of the Most High, God will cover me under His feathers, and under His wings we will find refuge. We knew that Christ Church members were also praying for us, which was also a great encouragement during that time.

As I prayed each day, God pointed me to the sparrows outside the window and reminded me that He would surely take care of us. We prayed and trusted God to help us return home before our visa expired on 8 April.

On 3 April, we got a call at 9am from the Tourism Board to say that the very last bus travelling from Pokhara to Kathmandu will leave at 12 noon that day. The representative advised us to go to Kathmandu and wait there for a rescue flight. But Kathmandu was under a lockdown. We felt that it would be better to stay in Pokhara than go into the city without knowing

if there would be a rescue flight at all.

Immediately, I prayed and asked the Lord that if we needed to take that bus, MFA had to call by 10:30am to tell us that there will be a rescue flight to Singapore so that we have time to get to the bus station and board that last bus. If not, it would mean that God wanted us to stay in Pokhara.

Amazingly, at 10:30am, MFA called to say that Malaysia was sending a rescue flight the next day and Scoot would fly to KLIA to bring the Singaporeans home. What an answer to prayer!

I was astounded at the timing. We got our things together and took the bus to Kathmandu. From the overnight stay in the city, to the transportation that the Malaysian Embassy organised for us to get to the airport, and the free food on board the budget flight, we thank God for His every provision.

I had also prayed, "God if it is your will, please let us be able to go home to rest." When we arrived in Singapore, we realised that we could serve our two-week quarantine in our own homes. I was overjoyed. We arrived home extremely tired from our 24 hour journey but with our hearts full of praise

to God who is powerful yet personal in every way.

God continued to provide for us through family members who brought us necessities, a church member who brought us groceries and our neighbour who brought us food the next day.

We are extremely thankful to everyone who prayed for us, to our family and friends and the Deanery of Nepal for their care and support, and the Parish of Christ Church for being our family and partner in Nepal. We wait for God's time to return to Nepal as we surrender our lives to serve Him. ✚

IN MEMORIAM

REVD SANJEEV SUNAWAR, Priest at St Petra Church, Nepal was called home to be with the Lord, at 11.30pm on Wednesday, 13 May 2020. He was 36. The cause of his death remains unknown.

Sanjeev was trained as a lawyer, and was a member of Church of Christ the Nazarene before he felt called by the Lord to leave his practice and the comfort of his home church to plant St Petra Church. Today, St Petra Church is a vibrant congregation of about 100 members, most of whom work as labourers at the fringe of the Kathmandu Valley. Sanjeev went on to complete his theological training and was ordained as a Deacon in 2016, and was priested in Singapore's St Andrew's Cathedral in 2017. He was a quiet person by nature, but his heart was always warm towards people, especially the needy. He left behind his wife, Mani Devi and two young children, Samarpan (7) and Samprada (4).

It was a very sad day for the Sunawar family, and also for the whole Anglican Church in Nepal. We have lost a loving husband, a doting father, a caring pastor, and a dear and faithful brother in Christ.

We cherish your prayers for the Sunawars and also for the Anglican Church in Nepal. We grief,



but we are also convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord." (Romans 8:38-39)

We welcome any financial contribution to support the Sunawar family. Kindly mark your contributions with "Sunawar" and send it to the bank account of the Deanery of Nepal.

(DBS BANK, Account No: 003-928254-0).



NEW DEACONESSES

Three new deaconesses were added to the ranks at the Diocesan Making of Deaconess Service on 26th July 2020 at St Andrew's Cathedral. Capped at fifty participants, many more were watching it through the Diocesan Youtube channel. The video of the Service can be viewed here. 

Below, the three new deaconesses, Chow Wai Keng (Chapel of Christ the Redeemer), Grace Tan and Ti Lian Swan (both from the Cathedral) share their testimonies.



DEACONESS CHOW WAI KENG



My journey of faith in Jesus began in 1977 on not the most auspicious day (3rd day of Chinese New Year: considered bad luck!). However, it turned out to be the best decision I have made in my whole life.

I praise and thank the Lord for His love, guidance and favour over the years in this faith journey wherein I have served the Lord in the local church at Chapel of Christ the Redeemer (10 years) and in the mission field of Thailand (17 years).

My recent "Long and Unexpected Journey" of 11 months (September 2019 - July 2020) has also impacted me. I realised that I am 'Blessed to be a blessing' in whatever circumstances I go through in life (Though it wasn't an easy journey at all! It was the grace of God that had sustained me).

One Pastor had shared with me at the beginning of this journey, that the Lord was bringing me into a "hidden place". I thank the Lord that He has enabled me to emerge stronger knowing that He keeps His promises and is always faithful no matter what! And the many prayers offered by countless people on my behalf.

The Lord has turned my 12-hour major surgery miraculously into 6 hours on 22nd July 2020. For 10 months prior to the surgery, I had a hole in my gullet that refused to heal. Hence, I wore a feeding tube and no food/liquid should enter through my mouth. God is very true to His promise in Jeremiah 30:17 "'But I will restore you to health and heal your wounds,' declares the Lord".

Today, I stand before Him and this congregation to testify to the greatness and goodness of our Lord God Almighty who never fails to amaze me. Thank you, Jesus. The next phase of my life will be dedicated to serving the Lord for His greater glory with the empowering and help of the Holy Spirit and fellow brethren in Christ. To God be the glory!



DEACONESS GRACE TAN PUAY LAN

A Journey of Grace



I was baptised as an infant in an Anglican Church and brought up with the belief that I am a Christian. I can still recall the happy memories when, as a child, I would look forward to receiving one red hard-boiled egg from Church during Easter and one orange during Christmas. I studied in a mission school, attended the weekly chapels and was even the prayer secretary of the Inter-School Christian Fellowship. But Christianity was just another religion to me, not much different from the other faiths of my friends. Life in my childhood and teenage years comprised primarily of studies, with the serious pursuit of academic excellence in the hope of a brighter future.

But at age 16, things changed. At a loose end after my 'O' Level exams, I accepted an invitation of some classmates to join a carolling team to bring good cheer to the old folks' homes during Christmas. There at the carolling practices, I was deeply impacted by the choir mistress, Jenny, whose demeanour and sweetness of character led me to question, 'Why is she so different? What does she have that I do not have?' Then came the startling conclusion - she is so different because she is truly a Christian!

That set me off thinking deeply about Christianity. I began to question, 'Why did Jesus come to earth? What is Christmas all about?' One evening while on a bus to carolling practice, I happened to gaze at the sky pondering the same question, 'Why did Jesus come?' Suddenly in the night sky, I saw the Cross. And the words 'For God so loved the world that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in Him, will not die but have everlasting life.' And then the words became personal. 'For God so loved you, that He gave His Son for you, that if you will believe in Him, you will not die but have everlasting life.' I was so stunned! Jesus came to earth to die for me!

That year on Christmas Day 1972, I knelt by my bed and invited Jesus to be my Saviour and my Lord. The desire to know Jesus became very real. I read the gospels in search of this Saviour. There also followed a search for a church to belong and I was led, first to an AOG church where I was baptised in the Holy Spirit, and then to St Andrew's Cathedral where I started serving in the Sunday School and then joining the full time staff team in 1990.

God has placed within me a deep desire to share Him through His Word. And so, it's been a journey of theological studies in the past years, to equip myself in the Word so as to teach it. There have been many twists and turns in the journey. Through it all, God has been so faithful. And He has blessed me with wise and patient mentors, a supportive family and loyal friends to cheer me on in this journey. I am deeply grateful to God for all of them. May this life count for Him, to His praise and glory!



'Can man, by searching, find God?'

DEACONESS TI LIAN SWAN

Conversion and early beginnings

I attended kindergarten and Sunday School in Church of Our Saviour but I never knew Jesus as my personal Saviour till I was 14. I often doubted my salvation till God led me to Jennifer Chua in New Bridge Road Brethren Chapel. She grounded me in the faith and Yan Noi built on that foundation. I went "door-to-door evangelism" with them every Saturday, where I learnt how to share the gospel and to follow up new believers. I served God in these two areas and later, as a cell leader, church leader, but I backslided in my twenties.



Watershed experience

At this low point of my spiritual life, I cried out to God for help. He led me to Church of Our Saviour and into the charismatic renewal (something I had rejected earlier). I was filled with the Holy Spirit when Ps Derek Hong prayed for me. It was a watershed experience. I realised that in the past, I had been wearing myself out, serving God in my own strength. Being Spirit-filled gave me a deeper love for God, a greater hunger for His Word and a stronger passion for evangelism (Acts 1:8).

Call to full time ministry

In the early 1990's, I heard the call to full time ministry, through Exodus chapter 3, but God had also said "not yet". The time came 5 years later. Through a stranger in Faith Community Baptist Church, the Lord said to me "You are on the threshold of your life. God has a plan for you. You are to join the team in St. Andrew's Cathedral to fulfill God's redemptive purpose for the city. Even though you feel so small and insignificant, Jesus is with you." I have been serving God as a pastoral staff in SAC since 1998 and currently in the 7am Service, the Intercession and Connect Group Ministries. I thank God for His grace upon my life and I will continue to trust in Him for the journey ahead. To God be all the glory!

