

The Connecting Church: Re-imagining the Church of the Present and Future in this COVID-19 Pandemic Era

By Eld (Dr) Alex Tang



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The COVID-19 pandemic which is caused by SARS-CoV-2, a single strand of RNA cause a worldwide upheaval. It literally causes society to lockdown, confined billions to their homes. Churches worldwide are closed, with the cancellation of most church activities in church buildings. Overnight, it forced the church to move online utilizing numerous platforms and social media. Some churches are doing well in this, others not so. Now, as the pandemic begins to settle, there are indications that the

authorities will be slowly easing restrictions for churches to meet physically. While restrictions are eased, there still are many requirements that are instituted for the prevention of COVID-19 infection and reinfection. In general, church gatherings are limited to 30 persons or less at one time, meetings not more than one and a half hours, and should have 2 hours between meetings to allow for cleaning.

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Congregants seated distancing at least 1-2 meters from each other and should wear face masks. Temperature monitoring and personal contact information will be taken on entering the hall. People traffic is directed to move in one direction so that there will be no mixing. People are to leave church premises immediately after the services. Children under 15 years old and seniors more than 60 years old will not be allowed to attend the physical service. It is not known how long these restrictions will be implemented as there is no way of predicting how long the pandemic will last.

There has been a lot of literature on the Digital Church and the Distanced Church, implying that the digital mode is the next step in the evolution of the church. While the church may be connected digitally, there is still the need for human to human gathering. There are limits to human interactions through the electronic platforms. Deeper human relationships can only be built in the physical presence of each other. However, being forced online has opened the church's eyes to the vast potential of digital and the connectivity that the internet offers. The COVID-19

church will be where human gathers together. What is new is how it has expanded beyond its bricks-and-mortar shells to cyberspace to become a Connecting Church.

First, the Connecting Church is connected to God. During the lockdown, some churches have direct streaming Sunday services, while others use pre-recorded sermons. Congregants are encouraged to log in and participate in the worship. Some churches shut down totally. The deliverance of services depends on the technical equipment and abilities of the church. It is heartening to note that some of the bigger and more techno-savvy churches are offering courses and apprenticeship to help the smaller churches to set up online worship services. Some churches allow Holy Communion online at home. What is encouraging is that suddenly congregants are exposed to a wide variety of services and sermons as the online services are open to all. This has developed a sense of unity and togetherness for the congregations in these times of social distancing. The Holy Spirit continues to work through the internet and there have been numerous reports of

healing, deliverance, and divine encounters online.

Second, the timing of the development of communication software such as WhatsApp, WeChat, Telegram, social media such as Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, Pinterest, and Youtube, and streaming communication such as Facetime, Skype, Zoom, Google Meet, Facebook Live, and Microsoft Teams allow the socially distanced church to connect with one another. Many small groups in churches are meeting regularly, continuing their weekly meetings online. Individuals are reconnecting with each other through their telephones or online platform. Some are connecting long lost friends and reconnecting with others. Some churches hold regular prayer meetings online. Others continue their midweek devotional teachings. Attendance for these events is high because it is convenient to attend. Before, to attend a meeting one needs to dress, leave the house, and travel to attend a meeting. Now it is one step from the kitchen to the living room. These new emerging technologies enable the members of the church to be connected to each other. As was quoted by a member of a

church, “We are socially distanced but we are not spiritually distanced. We are actually closer now than ever before as a Body of Christ”. Yet, with all these technologies, we still need to be physically present with each other as we are embodied souls, and our interaction with the world is incarnational.

Third, small groups have always been where most interactions take place. It is the crucible of spiritual formation. It is the most connected part of the body of Christ. Relationships in small groups are the elements of spiritual formation. Small groups, also known as cell groups, are the level where human interaction interacts at its best, or its worst. The Acts 2 church is a small group and it has all the curricular forms of Godliness in its makeup. As the lockdown restrictions ease, probably the gathering of 10 or fewer people will be allowed. Hence the small groups will be the first part of the church to gather before the larger groups are allowed. In the meantime, the larger group will continue to stream and meet online with numerous restrictions to prevent large group gatherings.

Fourth, the large group which we commonly identify as the church. Prior to the pandemic, the decline of the Megachurch movement was observed by many church growth experts. The fall from grace of some of the megachurch leaders is sad reminders of the cracks in the movement. The megachurch movement is closely linked to the consumer culture from which it draws its inspiration. Around the time of the growth of the megachurch movement, there was also the cell church movement. Cell groups are small groups within a church, usually comprising of 10-20 members.

A church with cells is different from a cell church. A church with cells is a church that has cell groups as one of the activities of the church. The main focus is however on the main Sunday service, and the leaders are the pastors and church leaders overseeing the whole church. The main focus of the cell church is on the cells itself which the Sunday service is one of the functions of the cells. The leadership of the church lies with the cell leaders.

Most churches are churches with cells. The pandemic has revealed the vulnerability of this model. The lockdown

closed the main church which is usually sited in buildings. The suddenness of the lockdown caught the leadership of many churches off guard. Many churches are led by top-down leadership. Many churches were adrift in limbo while their leaders recovered from their shock and formulate some sort of response. However, within the first few weeks, it was found that it was members of small groups which are connecting with one another to encourage and comfort. When the leaders recover from their shock and reassert control of the cell groups, was the church considered to be functioning. It is my considered opinion that the cell churches did better in the lockdown as their leadership is not vertical but horizontal. They just continued with their connections and being church.

Finally, which type of church will survive the aftermath of the pandemic? Economic and social disruption will follow pandemic. Churches with cells are often heavily invested in buildings and staff. Money will be scarce as tithing amounts will be reduced as members face the financial crunch. Churches may be forced to heavily mortgage if not sell off

their buildings, and reduce their personnel. A cell church may not be so heavily invested in buildings and personnel. Cells usually meet in homes of members. They are likely to ride the storm better.

The situation is dire and there may be closure of churches and 'retrenchment' of pastors! A leader of a major denomination in Malaysia in a recent webinar estimated that one-third of the churches in his denomination may have to close down in the aftermath of the pandemic. These are mostly church with cells and heavily committed financially to the rental properties and staff.

There needs to be a paradigm shift in our thinking about the way we do and become church. I will suggest the COVID-19 Connecting Church be a Cell Church that is connected physically in homes and via technologies. Sunday services will be streamed into the cells. Perhaps it is no longer necessary for large auditoriums and offices. If needed, these churches can always rent a hall for their large group meetings. This makes more sense than owning large buildings which we utilize for a few hours every week. This will

reduce the financial burden and allows more members to take up leadership roles and cell leaders. This is more in line with the Biblical and Reformers' mandate of the priesthood of all believers. Understanding ecclesiology in terms of substance rather than the form allows us the liberty to choose.

In summary, what type of church will emerge from the dust once the lockdown is over and the authorities facilitate the opening of the churches? While many are hopeful that life will return to normal once the pandemic is over, the reality is that we have to live with the new normalcy. Unfortunately, there will be many Christian leaders who will want to return to the old normal, by force if necessary. What is this new normalcy and what will the church look like? Connectivity is the key here. We have discovered the genie of technology and there is no way to put the genie back into the jar. Social distancing is here to stay and in a way, we will remain a 'distanced' church. The organizational setup of a connecting cell church is a better option in times such as these.

From A Pastor's Desk

Let Us 'Prihatin' One Another

By Rev (Dr) Chuah Seong Peng

This year the theme for the National Day and Malaysia Day celebration is “*Malaysia Prihatin*” – “*Malaysia Cares*”. This theme was chosen to unite the people and build up the nation as we care for one another fighting this unprecedented pandemic. The word ‘*prihatin*’ can be new to some of us. I first came to know it with the government Prihatin Aid Package given to the people for this pandemic. It can be translated as *care, concern of others*. It is reflected in many ways as being considerate, thoughtful, sympathetic, affectionate, loving of others.

Jesus gives His disciples the Great Commandment to love God and others as they have loved themselves. This theme is therefore in line with our biblical mandate to love our neighbours. Therefore, let us be patriotic and join the nation to ‘*prihatin*’, care for one another. There are many opportunities for us to reach

out to our neighbours in this pandemic. The pandemic has brought great distress and untold sufferings to many people especially to the vulnerable, the old and the sick. Many businesses have suffered and are suffering. People’s daily livelihood have been severely hampered. There has been reported increase in domestic abuses as a result of the movement control. This is not counting the emotional distress especially for those who are separated from their loved ones. The economic repercussion and toll after the pandemic are yet to be seen. But as it is, we have received news that some have lost their jobs and some have even been evacuated from their homes due to failure to pay the rentals.

The Love Project has been active during this pandemic. We are thankful that God has provided resources in terms of people and finance to join Him in bringing help and relief to many people. I have heard of heart-warming stories from those who have worked with NGOs and those of other faith in ministering love and help to the poor and needy during the lock down. Let us therefore

continue to go out to the community to render help of various kinds in the coming days.

As we obey the Love Commandment, let us not lose sight of the Great Commission before us. Jesus in Matthew 28:18-20 tells us, *'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.'*

We are to go and make disciples of all people God is sending our way. Jesus assures us of His presence and authority to be with us. This is an urgent and important task before us as we look forward to His coming again. In fact, we are called to such task to hasten His coming again. For such mission, Jesus calls us to be the salt of the earth and light of the world. It is a great calling and a wonderful privilege to be looked upon in such manner by our Lord who

loves us. But let us be mindful that this great calling also comes with an exhortation and warning. Jesus also said in Matthew 5:14-16 that the light is to shine and cannot be hidden. It is to shine before men that they may see the good deeds done and praise God our Father in heaven. He further warns us in Matthew 5:13 that salt is to be tasty. Otherwise, it is useless and to be thrown out and trampled upon. Let us take heed of this great calling and warning and be the salt of the earth and the light of the world and *'prihatin'*, care and love others, expanding His Kingdom here on earth for His glory.

Most of all, let us come together and encourage one another in prayer to God for our nation and people to receive His Good News and bring blessings and revival to this beloved nation of ours. Let us join the nation in celebrating the National Day and Malaysia Day and care for all who are living in this land.

"Malaysia Prihatin" – "Malaysia Cares"! To God be the glory!

Leisure

By Dr Ngeow Took Fah

My childhood was rich in leisure and never lacking in fun. I enjoyed learning English and in particular, reciting poems that rhymed well, such as W.H. Davis' 'Leisure'.

What is life if full of care
We have no time to stand and stare,
No time to stand beneath the boughs,
and stare as long as sheep and cows.

After elaborating on the beauty of the English countryside, the teacher asked the class: 'What do you like to stare at?' Without hesitation, one boy raised his hand and answered: 'You, teacher'. While she blushed, the class burst into laughter.

How did a pretty face capture a young heart? Well, those were the days when the top police officer in the district was an expatriate, with his charming wife who volunteered as a part-time teacher to fill her leisure hours.

On my way home after school,

I would stop at the only theater of my semi-rural town, and stared at the huge billboard that showed the next change of movie, ignoring the memorization of multiplication tables and the amount of homework waiting to complete after lunch.

The only time the whole town would grind to a halt was to watch the funeral procession of some well known person, heralded by the school's brass band or the percussion troupe of a Chinese clan association. My mother would say to her neighbour in Hakka, 'Ah! planting sweet potato again' - her euphemism for digging a grave to bury the dead.

Today, urban children no longer stand and stare at the beauty of nature. More likely their eyes are glued to the mobile phone and their minds immersed in electronic games, oblivious of the danger of road traffic accidents.

Everybody likes leisure, except perhaps a workaholic. What is so good about leisure? It can be considered from two aspects: time and activities involved. If we advocate a daily schedule made up of eight

hours of work, eight hours of sleep, then the remaining eight hours are for leisure: rest, relaxation and socializing. But this division is rigid and meaningless because people normally regard leisure hours as spare time, which can be easily robbed by either work or sleep.

In terms of activities, leisure is freedom from the demands of work or duties. In other words, leisure can be freedom to do something, to do anything or to do nothing.

Freedom to do something is conditioned on no compulsion, no obligation and no premeditation. It may benefit only yourself with things like hobbies, reading, sports and exercise, checking and sending e-mail, attending concert, etc. In fact, one way of developing cultural versatility is through the use of leisure for various cultural display.

Freedom to do anything which, regardless of consequence, may be purposeless except to waste time. For example, watching any tv advertisement or programme that appears, surfing internet, gossip over

the phone, joining the herd in peaceful or violent demonstration, graffiti daubing, etc.

G.K. Chesterton, the English writer well known for his many quotable quotes, considered doing nothing as the purest form of leisure. By pure he meant that it is non utilitarian, providing just rest and relaxation. But at a deeper level, the benefits of leisure become more spiritual and restorative, allowing for creative thoughts and gaining perspectives through living the past. Finally, at the deepest level, leisure is transformative, contributing to our continual conversion into childlike people who enjoy God and delight in His creation.

Ironically, freedom to do nothing is also the type of leisure feared and avoided by Christians, due to many scriptural prohibitions against idleness or sloth, one of the seven cardinal sins. For example, 'If a man will not work, he shall not eat' [2 Thessalonians 3:10]. 'We do not want you to become lazy, but to imitate those who through faith and

patience inherit what has been promised' [Hebrews 6:12]. Paul's advice to Timothy about young widows, 'and not only do they become idlers, but also gossip and busybodies, saying things they ought not to' [1 Timothy 5:13]. 'If a man is lazy, the rafters sag, if his hands are idle, the house leaks' [Eccl. 10:18].

But doing nothing for leisure is not the same as laziness or sloth. According to Puritan Richard Baxter, 'sloth signifies chiefly the indisposition of the mind and the body, and idleness signifies the actual neglect or omission of our duties . Sloth is aversion to labour, through a carnal love of ease, or indulgence to the flesh.

Sloth is easily identified: when the very thought of labour is troublesome, when ease seems sweet, when the easy part of some duty is called out, when you work with a constant weariness of mind, when you consistently offer excuses or delay, and when little impediments stop you.

Dr Paul Stevens, professor of applied theology at Regent College, propounded three

biblical themes that would help us develop a theology and spirituality of leisure. Firstly, the mandate to enjoy God's creation. He pointed out the fallacy of theologians focusing on the dominion or rule aspect of the creation mandate [Genesis 1:28] and neglecting the implications of God's joy over creation [Genesis 1:31].

Secondly, God's grace enables people with confidence in the Gospel free to do nothing. The evidence for this is found in the sabbath, the weekly statement that Israel could trust God to care and provide. Both Sabbath and leisure are restorative and non-utilitarian. While sabbath is contemplative and directed towards God, leisure is more hedonistic and directed towards ourselves. Sabbath is a divine requirement, whereas leisure is a divine permission.

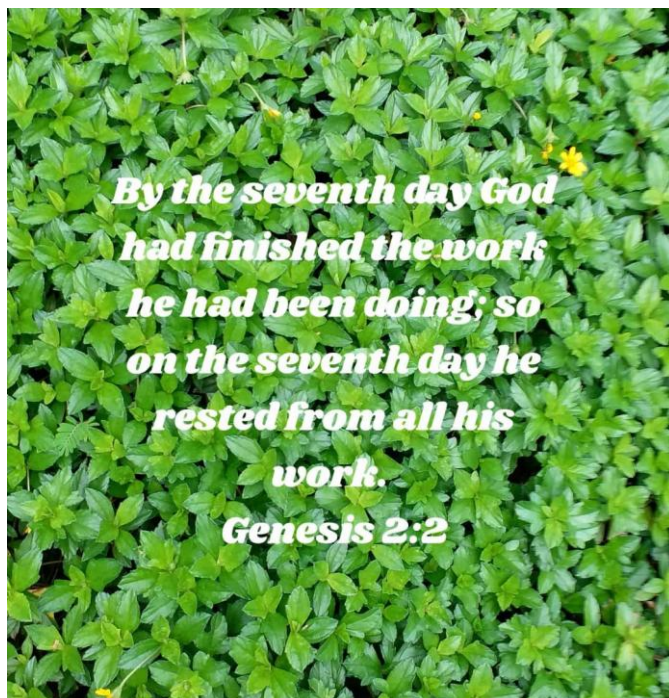
Thirdly, time is a commodity in the secular world. To Christians it is a gift of God. So a theology of time will help us waste time in a holy way. Leisure as doing nothing need not be sloth if it arises from the Word of God and prayer, meaning it is an actual sign that you believe God is

running the world and you can therefore take some rest.

Thomas Merton, contemporary American theologian, commented: 'We are obsessed with doing that we have no time and no imagination left for being. As a result, men are valued not for what they are but for what they do or what they have, for their usefulness.

So Christians do not have to feel guilty when you do nothing in your leisure. The poet W.H. Davis was right when he concluded:

'A poor life this is, if full of care
We have no time to stand and stare'.



Teo Family Update

Dear friends,

Greetings and we sincerely hope that you are all keeping well under the current circumstances. It has certainly not been easy for many of us facing the drastic changes to our lives under the new normal with the many health and travel restrictions. But we are grateful to the Lord that in Malaysia, the number of Covid-19 cases are under control and we are thankful for God's grace and mercy.

Work Permit Update

Thank you for praying with us about our Canada work permit application. When the Conditional Movement Control Order in Malaysia transited into the Recovery Movement Control Order on 11 June 2020, we went to the Chinese Consulate in Kuala Lumpur, thinking it might now be opened but unfortunately, it remained closed to the public except for special cases. Since our dateline for submission was due, we then wrote in to the Canada Immigration to furnish them with our Malaysian No Criminal Record

and explained that we were unable to get the documents needed to apply for the China No Criminal Record. The Canada Immigration just responded to our letter a few days ago on 2 July 2020 and they now require us to furnish them with a fresh employment letter from OM Canada to specify a new start work date. There was no mention of the China No Criminal Record so this new development looks very positive. At the point of writing this newsletter, we are in the midst of contacting OM Canada to work out a suitable start work date taking into account the present travel restrictions and border controls. We think that a likely new start work date will be in early September. We continue to wait and trust the Lord for His favour in the work permit process.

Started Work Online

During the last few months, Chris was able to start his role as a Missions Coach. He has been assigned to be in charge of East Asia Region and currently there are 8 units of Canadians serving in Nepal, Laos, Myanmar, Japan and Vietnam. Part of his role is member care and Chris has

been able to begin to connect with and to get to know some of the colleagues serving in these countries and to understand more about their ministries. He will also be involved in candidate processing, to prepare and to send out workers into East Asia. It has been a new learning curve but it is exciting and refreshing to be involved in missions from a wider perspective. In the past, we have been very much focussed only on one aspect of work in China, but now we get to learn about other ministry platforms and opportunities within OM. We also learn about the huge spiritual needs in many parts of the world and we are reminded to continue to be prayerful and intentional about the work of missions as commanded by our Lord in the Great Commission. There are also a lot of short term opportunities within OM but unfortunately, many of the short term mission trips this year had to be cancelled due to the pandemic.

Lifelong Learning

During the lockdown, thanks to technology, we have also been able to join some OM online courses, participate in

OM Global prayer meetings, go through a series of teachings on the Old and New Testaments by David Pawson, join a Holy Light weekly cell group and join some Sunday worship online. Chris also learnt how to cook from Joo Ping (after all these years) and has now learnt to prepare porridge and some simple yummy dishes! During the last week of August, Chris will join the OM GO Conference conducted online. This conference is an orientation course for new OM workers before they leave for the field. Connecting with people virtually is of course a lot different from face to face meetings, but under the circumstances, we thank God for this alternative platform for meetings and relating with people. During the lockdown, there were days that we felt restricted and challenged, but we thank God that things in Malaysia are gradually opening up.

Prayer Request

Thank you all for being part of our journey of faith. We covet your prayers for us as we await the work permit process to be finally approved. There are days when we sometimes

feel anxious and concerned about how we will adjust and adapt to a new country and culture, having to make new friends and find a new church and be part of a new community. There will be many new things for us to re-start and re-settle. We pray for God to pave and prepare the way ahead of us. We are however thankful that we get to be nearer our two daughters and we pray that this transition together will be a smooth one. We thank God for this next phase of our life and ministry in Him.

Do keep in touch with us and share with us your journey in the Lord and how we can be praying for you too.

Blessings and Shalom to you and family.

Chris and Joo Ping

Visa Update

Dear friends

Just a quick update on our work permit application status.

We received an email today from the Canada Immigration to request both Joo Ping and I to courier to the Canada Visa Centre in Kuala Lumpur our

passports for further processing. We thank God for this good news and confirmation that we are following in the right direction for our next phase of life and ministry.

There are still many uncertainties ahead with regards to the pandemic and international travel restrictions and we will continue to monitor the situation. Presently, we are scheduled to officially report for work with OM Canada on 1 September.

Thank you all for prayers and walking with us each step of the way.

God bless.
Chris and Joo Ping

Work Permit Approved!

Dear friends,

Greetings! Trust you and family are all keeping well.

After many months of waiting, we finally received the work permit approval to OM Canada and we were pleasantly surprised to be granted a 3 years work permit till July 2023! We just received our passports back a few days ago

and we thank God that this is another important confirmation to us personally that we are following Him in the right direction. We thank God for you as you have journeyed with us and are instrumental to make this next chapter of our life and ministry possible. You may remember that we had shared with you that after our service with OMF was completed July last year, we placed before the Lord two desires of our hearts - that we may continue in full time service in cross-cultural missions and be based nearer to our two daughters, and God has made this possible and we experienced His miracle.

A verse that came across strongly to me last week was in Isaiah 43:2 - "when you pass through the waters, I will be with you, when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you". I must confess that during this time last year, I nearly drowned during the difficult and challenging time. I really thought I was going to be another one of those casualties and attrition statistics in ministry. But God preserved me and in my desperation, He showed up. He later opened a

door for me to join OM Canada when they were looking for a missions coach; when I was really doubting how I could raise the financial support I needed, He did a miracle by raising 80% of the support needed (at least for the first year). When we applied for the work visa, what was thought to be a 5 week process took 6 months! During this time, we again experienced His provisions and grace, and He gave us an extended rest and refreshing in our souls which we very much needed.

During the last few days after we received back our passports, we checked on the international travel controls and flights and are glad to share with you that we have just bought tickets to Canada for 12 August. We leave with anticipation and with much anxiety too, as we leave behind our ageing parents and family members, some of whom are not doing so well in terms of their health. When we get to Vancouver, we will need to be quarantined for 2 weeks and we thank the Lord for His provision for us to stay at Leanne's place whilst she temporarily moves out to Amanda's place to allow us to

self-quarantine. We look forward to Leanne's wedding coming up! Hao Yang is Malaysian, from Kuala Lumpur and the young couple will have a small wedding service in Vancouver on 26 September! We pray for God's blessings on them as they start their new life together.

With heartfelt thanks, we again want to thank you for your prayers, love and partnership in our journey of faith in the Lord and in the work of the gospel. We very much look forward to getting more people sent out to East Asia to share the love of God to this part of the world. We will continue to update you on our journey as we go along.

We pray the Lord's blessings and His face to continue to shine upon you and give you peace during this uncertain times.

By the way, if you do not wish to receive our updates, please feel free to let us know so we can remove you from the mailing list.

Shalom,
Chris and Joo Ping
31 July 2020

A Note Of Thanksgiving

By Grace Tan

In 2013, I moved down to Johor Bahru to report for duty several months after the ending of a romantic relationship. Instead of letting my faith carry me through this stormy chapter, I allowed my broken heart to shake my faith – making me question not only God but also the love of those around me. Struggling to trust after being betrayed, I was unsure if God was real or if He was not – that meant that life was rather meaningless, as I had entered teaching believing that it was His calling for me. My disillusionment with the past made the future seemed bleak and hopeless. There was even a time when I hid in the school toilet overwhelmed with anxiety, fear and hopelessness. Over the span of a year and a half, God healed my broken heart and helped me to forgive through the love, prayers and support of my parents, my spiritual mother, Auntie Toon Fung, Pastor Gan and Auntie Hong Choo. Yet, I found it difficult to trust that I would be able to meet a suitable life partner as the scars of the past made me more cautious and sceptical – I had to be

certain that a relationship was from the Lord as I dared not trust in my own wisdom lest history repeats itself. At that time, it felt like my frail faith was being pushed beyond its limits when Auntie Hong Choo would constantly encourage me to trust God “who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us” (Ephesians 3:20) for a life partner. Thankfully, God’s ability and power are not limited by the size of my faith or the lack thereof.

As I was praying one night in mid-2014, the name “Daniel Wong” came to my mind and took me by surprise as I was praying about someone else. Although I did observe from his Facebook profile that we did have some common interests, I eventually brushed it away as I had only met him once at the end of 2013 before he returned to the United Kingdom to complete a church apprenticeship. Little did we know then what God had in store for us. When he returned to Malaysia in August 2014, we worked together to plan a *Young Adults Makan Trip* which gave us the opportunity

and a safe environment to 'get to know each other'. I found that he had the familiarity and sense of humour of a close friend, which brought much comfort as I was still struggling with trust issues. After we realised that our feelings for each other were mutual and after Daniel passed several rounds of interviews (to be safe), we began dating officially in 2015 and got married the following year. Even as marriage and parenthood becomes more challenging, truly the Lord has given a life partner who is more than I could ever ask for or imagine. On days when it is hard to be thankful, I remember my husband, who is God's biggest blessing to me – both physically and metaphorically.

Looking back at my time in Johor Bahru since 2013, I am reminded and thankful for the Lord's provision, goodness and love especially during times of darkness, doubt and unbelief. At the end of it, I am also reminded of the truth of Isaiah 30:21, *Whether you turn to the right or to the left, your ears will hear a voice behind you, saying, "This is the way; walk in it."*, and that our God does

not leave us as orphans, giving us the Holy Spirit to counsel and guide us. In fact, I would have applied for Sarawak for my posting as a teacher if Johor Bahru did not come to my heart – showing how we may plan to the best of our limited ability and knowledge, but it is Him who determines our steps (Proverbs 16:9). Certainly, His ways and thoughts are higher than ours. Although it was a painful journey and one of the most difficult chapters of my life, I am indeed thankful that He closed one door to prepare and make me available for when the right door was opened. The purpose for sharing this experience is twofold: to remind myself of His goodness and mercy as I, like the Israelites, have a tendency to forget and to hopefully encourage anyone else who may one day find themselves nursing a wounded heart while struggling to trust in God's goodness. Truly the Lord who has brought me through the Valley of Weeping will do the same for you as we persevere with a long obedience in the same direction.

God's All Sufficient Grace

By Ong Toon Fung

“Why are you so unfair?” This was the question I would ask ‘God’ in my growing up years. I would ask ‘God’ why of all the fathers in the world, he took my father away. Having lost my father at the age of 2, I have no recollection of my father. My memory of my father was those shared by my relatives and neighbours who spoke well of him. Thank God that He’s gracious and merciful. Not only did He not take offence at the insolence of a young girl but in His wisdom, love and mercy, led me to Batu Pahat (BP) where I received His saving grace.

My second sister (Grace’s mum) who is 2 years older than me was sent to Batu Pahat to do her HSC (STPM equivalent). She became a Christian while in BP and would often share her faith and experience of God with us. I would tease her about her belief. One day, while I was studying in BP, I received a letter from her who was

studying in UM then. She shared how God had provided, guided and protected us even though we were without an earthly father. God is a father to the fatherless, the defender of the widow. I thank God for blessing us with loving grandfather, uncles and aunties who cared for us. They are God sent.

Touched by God’s love, I took out a 4 spiritual law booklet (distributed by the ministry of Campus Crusade For Christ) in my possession and prayed to receive Christ into my life. BP was the best place for me to be nurtured in my walk with God through the school Christian Fellowship and Grace Church. The pastor of the church at that time, the late Pastor Eugene was a faithful teacher of God’s Word. Though he was called home to the Lord at a young age of 30 plus, his life had impacted many. I recall what he said in one sermon ‘Do not sell your birth right for a bowl of ang tau chwee (red bean soup)’, a reminder to guard our faith zealously.

I continued my tertiary education in UM where I was

blessed by the teachings of various gifted preachers in the Varsity Christian Fellowship and SS Methodist Church. Throughout the 4 years, God provided for my financial needs. Due to the economic crisis in 1986, though trained as a teacher, I was not posted to any school. In God's perfect plan and timing, I came to JB where my faith was further strengthened through the faithful teachings of Rev Nicholas Yeo, the elders of HLCE and the Young Adults Ministry.

A year later, I was posted to teach in Gua Musang, Kelantan before being reposted to JB in 1988. After teaching for 9 years, I traded my iron rice bowl for God's overflowing grace and provision when I resigned from teaching upon the arrival of our youngest child, Joseph. Only God could have given me the courage to make such a bold decision. God continued to provide when Gan went to theological college and subsequently, full-time ministry. God faithfully provided for our 3 children who received good education.

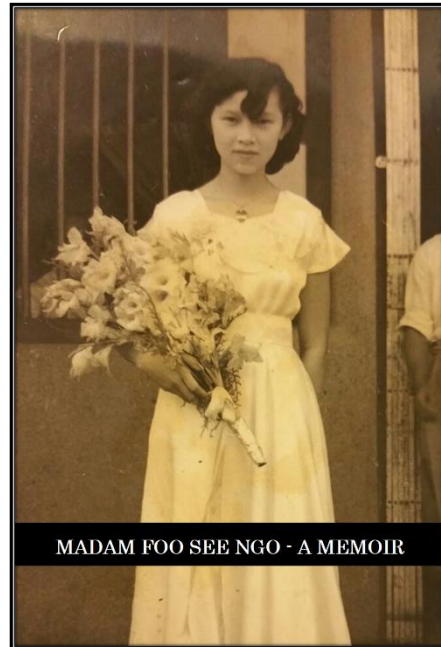
He is indeed Jehovah Jireh, our provider.

God's Saving Grace

40 years ago, when I told my mum that I had become a Christian, she cried. She told me that she had lost a daughter. I assured her that not only did she not lose a daughter, she had gained a better one. Over the years, 7 out of mum's 8 children became Christians. Mum must have seen God's goodness in our lives. On Mother's Day in 2005, God gave me the honour to lead my mum in prayer to receive Christ into her life. Since then, mum experienced God's presence in her earthly life before she was called home on 24 July 2016. Mum is fondly remembered, deeply missed and dearly loved by her children and their spouses as well as her grandchildren. In loving memory of mum, a memoir comprising various articles written by some of us was compiled by mum's granddaughter, Grace.

My eldest brother, Oscar was only 9 years old when our father passed away. He was

most affected by the loss of our father. He was the first person I prayed for when I became a Christian. Life was challenging and even more so without God. In May 2013, my sister-in-law was diagnosed with cancer. Only God could turn an adversity into an opportunity. My sister-in-law recommitted her life to God and through her battle against cancer, Oscar saw God's goodness and faithfulness. Touched by God's love and mercy, Oscar committed his life to God on 28 January 2018. I was given the honour to pray with him. Last December, he was baptized in Kluang Agape Presbyterian Church, the church I was baptized and grew up in, in my early Christian life. God is gracious and compassionate. He does not want anyone to perish but everyone to come to repentance.



To quote, only God can turn
a mess into a message,
a test into a testimony,
a trial into a triumph and
a victim into a victory.

Indeed, in God, we are more
than conquerors! To God be
the glory!

NB: Contributions to Sinews newsletter, via email to spcheong88@gmail.com (in Microsoft Word format), in the form of articles, testimonies and original photographs (with captions) are welcome, but we reserve the right to edit them in the interest of HLCE. Views and opinions expressed herein do not necessarily represent that of HLCE or the editor.



The HLCE OA Team presenting 20 Alkitab, 45 Perjanjian Baru, 60 Pedoman Harian, 10 sets of Tinjauan Perjanjian Baru/Lama, 1 gitar, 50 tins of milk powder, some school bags and clothes to the OA representative Ps Yohanes in Kpg Jemeri on 16/8/2020.



The HLCE OA Ministry Committee Meeting in progress in Kpg Jemeri on 16/8/2020.



Surveying the place for worship and children ministry in Kpg Jemeri, 16/8/2020.



Surveying the place for worship/children ministry/cells in Kpg Kerpai. Third from left is Len Chek, owner of the abandoned building.



Praying for the sick in Kpg Kerpai. During the past 2 months, more than 20 people have accepted Christ in this village.



Youth from Gereja Anugerah Kasih HLCE helping Pusat Didikan Komuniti (PDK) in worship as a way to reach out to the children. Third from right is Analisa who is teaching children English and Maths under PDK.



Face shield on for Sermon



Worship with face shield



Worship with SOP



Social Distancing seating arrangement



Baptism of Dr Wong Chuan Lun on 25 July, 2020

