

Pelita METHODIST



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Partnership In Missions United Church of Bangladesh



Bishop Hwa Yung being shown around the area.

In response to an invitation from Bishop Benjamin Biswas of the United Church of Bangladesh (UCB) during the Trinity Annual Conference last year a team of four visited the country from 1-6 March this year. The invitation was to minister at the annual Blessed Wednesday Revival Prayer Meeting.

The team consisted of Bishop Hwa Yung, Dr Lim Kean Ghee, Mr Sebastian Simeon and I, all seasoned visitors to Bangladesh having been on previous mission trips. Bishop Hwa Yung, some ten years ago, spoke at a Bangladeshi pastors' conference organized by World Vision. It was here that he first met Bishop Benjamin Biswas, a friendship that blossomed into a partnership in missions, initially with TRAC's Perak District and eventually with the TRAC Board of Missions.

Mission teams in the past ten years have gone to Bangladesh to encourage the fledgling UCB congregation, train leaders, and engage in community development projects and medical aid. On this trip, the aims were to see first hand developments in UCB, assess the mission partnership and consult on future involvement.

We arrived at dusk in Nittyanadapur on Saturday 1 March after an eight-hour drive in a passenger van directly after we touched down in Dhaka that day. Tabla drums and the entire village singing songs of praise greeted our arrival. A service of thanksgiving with children singing Bengali songs interspersed with "Hari Ini Tuhan Jadikan" and "We Shall Overcome." I suspect these are the indelible marks imprinted by Rev. Timothy Lam on previous trips here.

The following day saw us going to a neighbouring village, Joginda, to join the congregation there for the Sunday Eucharist and worship. Bishop Hwa Yung shared a message on repentance based on John 4:1-26.

On returning to Nittyanadapur, Dr Lim Kean Ghee and Dr Stephen, a local doctor, began their village clinic with Sebastian helping in dispensing medicines. Later that evening we joined the folks in St. Peter's Cathedral for worship and Eucharist.

On Monday morning we visited several pre-schools run by UCB's Pratibeshi Women's Project. There is a total of 15 such pre-schools around the Gangni area, each having 25 pupils. They are staffed by dedicated teachers who are given an allowance of Taka 700-900 (RM35-45) a month.

>>continue on page 2



Rev. Bernard Yogaraj, Mr. Sebastian Simeon, Dr. Lim Kean Ghee.

Meanwhile, Dr Lim and Dr Stephen were performing surgery on several patients. This was done in a private clinic run by Dr Razak who consented for the operating room and facilities to be used without any charges. Five surgeries were performed over two days.

The Blessed Wednesday Revival Prayer Meeting was held over three days, beginning on Monday evening. Over two hundred people came that first meeting. We were told Christians from other denominations, Hindus and others were present.



Choirs from neighbouring villages accompanied by tablas, harmonium and bamboo flutes rendered “dekil

barat” type hymns. The lead singers and their chorus could enthrall those gathered to the point of tears, relating in music the life of Christ and his mission. Later that evening I shared two messages with them.

Tuesday was an entire day of ministry. By 8.00 am people gathered expectantly. Bishop Hwa Yung shared the opening message and the rest of the day and into the night was interspersed with faith songs from choirs and messages. Before dismissal that night at 11.00 pm over 50 people came forward for prayers.

On Wednesday morning a surprise awaited us. We discovered the tents erected outside St. Peter’s Cathedral in tatters. A small cyclone had hit the district before dawn! The revival meetings resumed in the Cathedral. Bishop Hwa Yung in the closing message challenged those present to seek God to make a difference in their lives that through them many more lives and circumstances in Bangladesh will be transformed as never before. Leaders and lay people came forward pledging to begin revival.

It is indeed an honour to serve the people in Nitty nadapur. In the health

clinics and surgery, sharing messages at the Revival Meeting, praying for individuals and in the friendships forged, the team experienced a new lease of life. Each of us received a new understanding of what it means to be ‘One body in Christ’ with our brothers and sisters in Nitty nadapur.

Looking back, my one prayer is that we should be as much of a blessing to the people of Nitty nadapur as they have been to us. As a team, we want to thank all those who kept us in prayer, donated generously towards the UCB missions effort – words cannot express the love and gratitude these people have for your generosity which they receive from you.

Pre-school teacher’s training, leadership workshops, alternative technologies for rural villages are some of the areas that we can contribute to the people in Nitty nadapur. TRAC tries to organize two trips annually. Will you want to come out of your comfort zone and make a difference in the lives of others?

Rev. Bernard Yogaraj
Wesley Methodist Church
Teluk Intan, Perak.

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What is Happening in our Annual Conferences?

June

2-6	Mon-Fri	SCAC World Association of Chinese Church Music Training
6-9	Fri-Mon	CAC - World United Methodist Youth Conference
8	Sun	CAC Sunday School Teachers Training
5-9	Tue-Sat	World Federation of Chinese Methodist Churches Youth Convention
6-8	Fri-Sun	TAC Local Preachers Training Institute TRAC School for Intercessors Trainers & Prophetic Songs Retreat
8	Sun	Methodist Education Foundation Sunday
12-13	Thu-Fri	TRAC Board of Ministry Retreat
14	Sat	TRAC Executive Board Meeting
15-21	Sun-Sat	TAC Christian Home and Family Week
20-21	Fri-Sat	TRAC Christian Education Resource Workshop
21-22	Sat-Sun	SIAC Bintulu District Lay Seminar
24-26	Tue-Thu	Asian Methodist Council Assembly – Johor Baru
28	Sat	TRAC Board of Youth Work Meeting

July

4-7	Fri-Mon	TRAC School for Intercessors (Cycle 2) # 1
5	Sat	TAC Malaysian Missionary Movement Board Meeting
10	Thu	Council of Presidents Meeting
11-12	Fri-Sat	General Conference Executive Board (2)
17	Thu	TAC DS / Board of Ministry / Board of Finance
18	Fri	TAC Executive Board Meeting (III)
18-20	Fri-Sun	TRAC Missions Consultation
19	Sat	TAC Board of Evangelism Meeting
27	Sun	TAC TMC Malacca 100 Years Celebration

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A new series of 11 articles on the Ten Commandments begins in this issue. Dr Roland Chia gives us an introductory overview of these 'Ten Words' in this first article.

The Ten Commandments: Precepts for God's People

Dr. Roland Chia

The Ten Commandments, which have often been described as Israel's 'constitution' or 'Bill of Rights', plays an indispensable role in providing the fundamentals of the covenant people's religious and moral conduct before Yahweh. These 'Ten Words' therefore assume pride of place in the Hebrew Scriptures even as they are inextricably bound to the larger story of God's redemptive activity. The Decalogue has always played a significant role as the vital source of the Church's reflection on its own life and practise before God. The Ten Commandments are faithfully taught in the great catechisms of all the traditions of the Christian Church – Orthodox, Roman Catholic and Protestant. The Decalogue resonates so deeply with God's revelation that the great Reformer Martin Luther could declare that 'Anyone who knows the Ten Commandments perfectly knows the entire Scriptures'.


Throughout most of Christian history, the Ten Commandments were at the heart of Christian piety and enjoyed a prominent place in public worship and private devotion. However, this is sadly no longer the case! Protestant Christianity in general, and evangelicalism in particular, has pushed these 'Ten Words' into the background, and has instead allowed subjective standards of ascertaining the health of the soul to take centre-stage. This trend is no doubt inspired by

postmodern society's general aversion to the notion of commandments of any sort, which are always seen negatively as stifling the freedom of individuals. Commandments of any sort, and perhaps especially divine commandments, have acquired an unattractive patina for postmoderns because they inhibit the development of free agents and violate their rights.

Throughout most of Christian history, the Ten Commandments were at the heart of Christian piety and enjoyed a prominent place in public worship and private devotion. However, this is sadly no longer the case! Protestant Christianity in general, and evangelicalism in particular, have pushed these 'Ten Words' into the background, and have instead allowed subjective standards of ascertaining the health of the soul to take centre-stage.

For evangelical Christians saturated with the notions of grace, the Ten Commandments point to the law, and therefore must be respectfully left behind. This pervasive misunderstanding of the place of the law in the Christian life must be addressed, and the best way to do this is to recover the significance of the Decalogue. While it is true that the Decalogue lays down many demands, we must not forget the context in which these demands are made. The words that serve as the preamble to the Commandments are often glossed over. Yet, it is in these words that we find the context for the 'Ten Words': 'I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery' (Ex. 20:2). The giving of the law is the culmination of the deliverance of Israel from slavery in Egypt. If God's deliverance of Israel is borne out of his great love for his people, then the giving of the law completes that act of divine love. Law, then, is a gift of love. God's love and grace are the setting for God's demands.

Once we understand the Decalogue in this way, they are no longer seen as a litany of dos and don'ts that legalistically bind us to a set of inflexible rules. Seen as a gift of love, the Ten Commandments become essential for God's people because they teach them how to be. They help Israel to understand what it means to be a people set apart by a holy God so that she may be in covenantal fellowship with him. The Decalogue must be understood in the context of this covenant relationship if it is not to be reduced to



Thus in declaring ‘Thou shall not commit murder’, the Commandment is promoting the culture of life. Here again, when the Commandments are understood in greater depth, they have to do with more than just a catalogue of sins. They have to do with the very foundation of human society, and they provide the moral compass for social intercourse. The Commandments point us to those things that are ultimate, and really important in life.

impersonal regulations. Seen in the context of that vital relationship between Israel and Yahweh, the Commandments help us to understand what true worship is all about. How are God’s people to worship? They are to do so by not committing murder, by not stealing and by not coveting that which belongs to their neighbours. Worship cannot be reduced to rites and rituals, however important they may be. True worship involves all of life. The Commandments challenge every attempt to drive a wedge between worship and ethics.

The Commandments are certainly a set of prohibitions, often tersely expressed. But each prohibition also points forcefully and unequivocally to that which is affirmed. In the negativity of the Commandments, we find the positive assertions. In God’s ‘No’, we find his ‘Yes’! Thus in declaring ‘Thou shall not commit murder’, the Commandment is promoting the culture of life. Here again, when the Commandments are understood in greater depth, they have to do with more than just a catalogue of sins. They have to do with the very foundation of human society, and they provide the moral compass for social intercourse. The Commandments point us to those things that are ultimate, and really important in life.

The Commandments must be taken together. Secular society can only make sense of the Commandments when references to God are excised. This abstraction has meant that the Commandments are interpreted

according to the canons of secular ethics. But to the community of faith to which these Commandments were originally directed, the Commandments would lose their meaning altogether once they are not understood in light of the One who gave them. For instance, the command that prohibits murder will take a radically different and relativistic hue if it is not understood in light of God, the giver and sustainer of all life.

The Commandments therefore require that God’s people live in a way that is truly radical and counter-cultural. But these demands only make sense because God has made them. To put this differently, the radical demands of the Commandments are such that if God does not exist, it would make no sense for this community of people to live in this way. The Commandments therefore require God’s people to submit to the lordship of God, and to show their unconditional loyalty to God. And it is by their obedience to the demands of God in this covenant of grace and love that God’s people truly image their Creator.

In this way, the Commandments are profoundly political. They are the distinctive way in which God’s people do politics. By their obedience to God, Christians are already making a profound political statement. By simply being herself, the Church is already a political force in the world. It is also by her obedience to the Commandments – by refusing to embrace the culture of death, by rejecting all forms of injustices, by not acquiescing to the changing sexual norms

– that the Church fulfils her prophetic role in society. In other words, by being the community of character, the Church shows that there indeed is a more excellent way. But most importantly, by mirroring the divine holiness, the people of God point the world to the holy God of the covenant, the God who is also loving, merciful and gracious.

Dr Roland Chia is Dean of Postgraduate Studies and Lecturer in Historical and Systematic Theology at Trinity Theological College in Singapore. Dr Chia is a member of the Fairfield Methodist Church and worships at the Fairfield Preaching Point in Woodlands.

The giving of the law is the culmination of the deliverance of Israel from slavery in Egypt. If God’s deliverance of Israel is borne out of his great love for his people, then the giving of the law completes that act of divine love. Law, then, is a gift of love. God’s love and grace are the setting for God’s demands.

The 17th TRAC-MSF Annual Camp 2008 was held from 25 - 28 March 2008 at the Taiping Golf Resort, Taiping, Perak. Altogether 244 seniors, a fair number of them in their late seventies or early eighties, attended this year's Camp. The participants came by buses or they car-pooled. The seniors helped one another upon arrival and also during their stay at the Camp. The very elderly and those with difficulties in walking were housed nearer the main function area while the rest were placed in another block a couple of hundred metres away. Fortunately, there were two vans to transport the participants.

The largest contingent was from the MSF chapter of Trinity Methodist Church PJ, with 40 participants, while the next largest comprised about 30 seniors from the Glowing

The roadmap presented was the plan of reconciliation (understanding the heart of God), the price of reconciliation (understanding the heart of man), the purpose of reconciliation (walking in His righteousness) and finally the proof of reconciliation (witnessing as the Body of Christ). The seniors were not taxed too heavily with excessive information and they were inspired by his messages.

Beside the theme speaker, we had also Don and Mylene, two "green crusaders" who came to "preach" on how we can play our part in society through organizing and carrying out projects on recycling of household wastes. Their talk was very interesting and enlightening. Financially there is much to be recovered from household wastes while at the same time recycling can help prevent the degradation of our environment.

On Day 3 many participants joined the half day tours either to Lenggong or to Port Weld, while those who did not had friends or members of the local church take them to town for shopping. God was with us – the weather was fine even though it had been raining on other days. The tour was enjoyable and the food was good and cheap – a satisfying replacement for the meals at the resort!

It was light entertainment on fellowship nights when the seniors from the various chapters and also from GYM Singapore presented their items in the form of skits, group singing etc. There was also a display of God's gift through the beautiful rendering of talented voices of some individuals. Some chapters really put their hearts into the items. The seniors from TMC PJ put up a hilarious



'God in Christ Reconciling' TRAC-MSF CAMP 2008

Years Ministry (GYM) of Singapore. About 20 participants from the Taiping chapter registered for the camp although they did not stay in. There were altogether 14 MSF chapters from TRAC Malaysia present at the Camp.

The seniors normally look forward to the Camp and with each passing year the Camp becomes more and more significant to them. It is a time for the renewal of old friendship that is getting rarer and more meaningful with age. As age catches up with them, getting from one place to another can be difficult without assistance or some arrangement for group travel. The Camp is also the place for meeting new friends – to have fellowship with one another and also to let their hair down once in a while.

It is also a good opportunity to remind ourselves that we are a community of believers, reconciled to God through Jesus Christ and that we ought to love and care for one another and for the society at large. The theme speaker for the Camp was Rev. Dr. Tony Chi, a well-known and inspiring speaker from Haggai Institute, Singapore. He gave a message on each of the four days at the Camp, based on the theme "God in Christ Reconciling".

As part of leadership training there was a video presentation of an interview with Jimmy Carter, the former US president who, despite his age and previous high office, continues in his simple ways to help those in need, to work for peace and to bring about reconciliation among those of different racial background or diverse religious beliefs, while being rooted in the basic teachings of Christ. He showed grace in defeat when he lost his presidency, courage in keeping to his principles and humility and generosity in leading a life of sacrifice for humanity.

There was also a talk on the proposed TRAC Retirement Village by the people involved in the project. They were able to answer questions and to clear the doubts of some members concerning the project, which if successfully launched would be an example of community living among believers.

The sit-down Chinese dinner on the first night was a disaster but the band from CGMC Ipoh helped to boost the occasion. There were also complaints concerning breakfast on the next morning for many staying at the block away from the main function area. However the resort made up for the initial poor effort through an improvement on subsequent days.

fashion parade of biblical characters with the theme that all are sinners and whoever they are, big or small, they too are loved by God equally.

On the second day of Camp the AGM and the election of office-bearers were held. Rev. Hwa Jen, the TRAC Seniors Ministry Director chaired the election of office-bearers. There were only some minor changes in the list of new office-bearers who were installed on the final day of the Camp, during the Holy Communion service led by Rev. Hwa Jen and assisted by Rev. Dr. Tony Chi.

Despite the minor hiccups, the Camp on the whole was quite memorable and inspiring. The participants have much to thank members of the Organizing Committee, comprising MSF members from CGMC Ipoh, Wesley Ipoh and Wesley Taiping for their commendable effort.

To God be the Glory!

Khoo Soo Ghee
President
TRAC - MSF

Aldersgate Day

by Rev. Kristin Sachen



On May 24, 1738, John Wesley, burdened by the rejection of his enthusiastic gospel message by his Anglican brothers, went very unwillingly to an evening society meeting in Aldersgate-street, London. But, as he records in his journal, about a quarter to nine he felt his heart strangely warmed. "I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone, for salvation; and an assurance was given me that he had taken

away my sins, even mine, and saved me from the law of sin and death." Wesley's Aldersgate experience is identified as a turning point in his spiritual growth, a time in which the faith he preached so boldly became real for him and in him.

When we remember "Aldersgate Day," what exactly is it that we are commemorating? Here is a man who had been "washed in the Holy Ghost" as an infant in his baptism, been brought up in a Christian home, studied the Bible, prayed regularly, entered into holy orders, founded a reforming movement, engaged in good works, and used all the means of grace at his disposal. What could possibly have happened to him on that May evening that is worth our notice 266 years later?

There may be several ways to describe it, but the significance of Aldersgate could be described as the day Wesley joined the human race. Up to that point, he certainly identified with the unworthiness of humanity, drawing up lists of his failings and sins that are astounding in their detail. But he never quite saw himself in the same light as those who joyfully accepted faith in Christ as God's gift of salvation. He didn't have the sense

of forgiveness that his Moravian friend Peter Bohler taught him was the fruit of true faith. He was caught in the dance of either trying to earn God's love or feeling unworthy of ever receiving it. On May 24, his heart melted a bit, his humanity was revealed, and he knew he was just one of those for whom Christ died – no better, no worse. He let go and let God do the work of salvation in him.

On May 24 we commemorate the founder of Methodism's heart-warming experience, and find another opportunity to be among those who receive the gift of God's forgiveness, and not just the ones who offer it.

Hear the good news:

Christ died for us while we were yet sinners; That proves God's love toward us.

In the name of Jesus Christ, you are forgiven!

Kristin Sachen was associate general secretary for emergency services for UMCOR, a unit of the General Board of Global Ministries, United Methodist Church.

A Collect for Aldersgate Sunday

God of immeasurable grace
Your Spirit has from age to age,
confirmed your work of salvation in the hearts of those who love you.
Grant to your people a true spirit of worship,
That renewed in their calling
They might achieve the vision you have given to them.
May we become your people,
United and equipped to proclaim the good news of
Salvation for all,
By faith in our Lord Jesus Christ,
Who reigns with you, and the Holy Spirit
One God, now and for ever

Amen.

CAC Mission Articles



This report is on the mission trip to Chiang Rai, north Thailand, by members of the Chinese Methodist Church, Kuantan.
Editor

祇要願意，神必定預備

文：陶佩霞

2007年10月11至17日，關丹堂短宣隊第8次前往滿星疊，一同前去的短宣隊員包括陳華彬傳道、詹玉蓮執事、嚴慧貞姐妹、林師聰弟兄、羅佩菱姐妹以及陶佩霞姐妹。我們在回恩樂村逗留了7天，似乎是一段很長的時間，但我們都過得非常的充實！每一天都蒙神的帶領，每一天都有神的同在！

這次在滿星疊所進行的事工有培靈會、布道會，關懷探訪、栽培少年團及主日學、教導華文班、鈴鼓班、畫畫班、兒童少年茶園一日游、歌唱比賽及見證分享會等等。
我本身初任宣教委員會主席，早前就

希望能到那裏實地考察，了解當地情況。另外，我想借此機會，趁着自己還年輕的時候，讓自己有機會“受苦”，磨煉自己，並深信到滿星疊將是一個永遠難忘的經歷，更學習凡事單單仰望神！

在這趟短宣的日子裏，我看見全能神的同在和祝福。從第一天開始，陳傳道和玉蓮姐都“失聲”了，但每次當陳傳道和玉蓮姐要講道時，他們聲音都奇妙的恢復了！另外佩菱和陳傳道的鼻子敏感也奇迹般的没事了！或許會有人說，可能是因為那裏空氣清新的緣故，但我認為，除了環境的緣故，更大的原因是奇妙的神在看顧和帶領！我深信，是神要讓佩菱和陳傳道能在不受任何幹擾的情況下，完全專注在宣教的事工上！

有一次，嚴慧貞姐妹和玉蓮姐正忙着準備晚餐，周圍的小孩都在玩耍，很吵鬧。突然，聖靈感動可愛的佩菱，于是她把唱機開了，播了一首詩歌一

《主，我懇求你》。隨着，她便跳起舞來……此舉吸引了每一位小孩子的注意力，無論男女，都跟着佩菱的步伐和手勢跳起舞來！不再喧鬧啦！耶和華果然是智慧的源頭啊！

我們在村子裏也教導小孩和村民們認識衛生。我們幫助他們塗上頭虱藥，還有抓頭虱，但由於頭虱太多，村民們的頭髮又非常細，無計可施之下，我們唯有修剪他們的頭髮。感謝神的安排，短宣隊中，師聰弟兄和玉蓮姐對理發可是非常專業哦！

我們會懷疑自己是否有資格參加短宣，但祇要願意事奉神，他必定會帶領的！祇要順服神，他必定引導！靠着那加給你力量的神，凡事都能做；行在主的旨意，你凡事都能做！宣教是我們的阿爸父給我們每一個信徒的使命！是我的使命，也是你的使命！

以賽亞書52章10節說：“耶和華在萬國眼前露出聖臂，地極的人都看見我



們神的救恩了。”祇要願意的，相信神必定預備機會！祇要願意，不用擔心不知道如何宣教。你願意嗎？

（摘自華人年議會第27期《宣教快訊》）
Southern Bell 75 (2008)

A member of the mission team to Chiang Rai shares her experience and lessons learnt on that visit.
Editor

上帝沒有離棄他們

文：羅佩菱

真的很不可思議！這是我第一次參加短宣，坐了幾小時的飛機，我們終於到達了泰北！當時的心情非常興奮，期待與當地的小孩（我的寶貝學生）見面，把我懂的都教導他們。在興奮與開心的同時，我的心裏也漸漸有了擔心與憂愁，因為我在短宣隊裏是年齡最小的一個，懂的當然也比別人少，所以很擔心自己會做不好，令人不滿意。但是，我知道，祇要靠着主，凡事都能行！

到達滿星疊，看到村裏的小孩時，第一個反應就是“哇！天呀！”，他們看起來都是臟兮兮的；一開始真的很難適應那裏骯髒的環境，但慢慢地學

習適應後，感覺還不錯的。我為那裏的小孩感謝上帝。鈴鼓班原本祇有4次，但因為他們的恒心、好學、毅力和渴慕敬拜上帝的心，鈴鼓班的次數增加了雙倍！開始教時還蠻辛苦的，害怕來不及把所有的步驟教他們。他們都沒放棄，連休息時間也說要我繼續教，一點也不怕累。雖然練習的時間祇有短短的兩個小時，但他們在晚上的敬拜讚美時光裏却已經能跳出優雅的鈴鼓舞來敬拜主！在下一個的鈴鼓班裏，他們都變成了我的助手，幫我教導新的學生。他們的學習態度實在令人鼓舞和欽佩！

我們辦茶園一日游。抵達茶園後，去看瀑布，但需走過狹窄的山路和爛泥等的地方。我心裏一直為擔心着孩子們，怕他們會跌倒受傷。然而，他們倒為我擔心。他們不斷地扶着我的手，害怕我會跌倒。小小的身子，却有那麼大的愛心！上帝沒離棄他們，一群單純的小孩。主在他們的身旁保守、安慰及愛護着他們，給他們平安與喜樂，和一顆愛主愛人的心！

滿星疊，是神所祝福的地方！

（摘自華人年議會第27期《宣教快訊》）
Southern Bell 75 (2008)



The United Methodist Church General Conference

23 April – 2 May 2008, Fort Worth, Texas



Hope for Africa Children's Choir.



GC Opening Worship.



GC Closing Service.

Bishop Gregory Palmer preaches during closing worship at the 2008 United Methodist General Conference in Fort Worth, Texas.

By J. Richard Peck
May 6, 2008 | FORT WORTH, Texas (UMNS)*

The 2008 United Methodist General Conference opened its legislative session on April 23 with a Communion service celebrated at a wooden table fashioned from trees destroyed by Hurricane Katrina.

For the next 10 days, delegates heard stirring speeches and sermons offered from a pulpit made of the same hurricane-damaged trees—taken from the historic Gulfside Assembly retreat center in Waveland, Miss. Both the pulpit and the Communion table served as reminders of physical and spiritual storms and the common faith that links members of the 11.5 million-member church.

Under the theme “A Future with Hope—Making Disciples for Jesus Christ for the Transformation of the World,” the conference began on the 40th anniversary to the day when the Evangelical United Brethren Church united with the Methodist Church to form The United Methodist Church.

The 2008 meeting ended on May 2 with a worship service led by Bishop Gregory Palmer, the new president of the church’s Council of Bishops, declaring hope for the church through the power of the Holy Spirit.

In between, the assembly approved a \$642 million denominational budget for the next four years and created a hymnal

revision committee. It generally retained the church’s stances on homosexuality, including the declaration in the church’s Social Principles that homosexual practice is “incompatible with Christian teaching.” Delegates opened the door to significant structural changes as the church works to address its increasingly global nature. And it tweaked the denomination’s mission statement to read: “The mission of the church is to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.”

The worldwide church

The assembly reflected changing demographics, as membership has shrunk in the United States while growing in Africa and the Philippines and parts of Europe.

This gathering was less centered on issues confined to the United States than at previous assemblies. That was partially because 278 of the 992 delegates came from outside of the United States—100 more than attended the 2004 session. It also was the result of proposals from a task force studying the global nature of the church.

Delegates approved 23 constitutional amendments that would make it possible to change the church's U.S.-centric structure to a more uniform global structure. The amendments must be ratified by a two-thirds vote of the aggregate total of annual conferences. A 20-member committee will bring recommendations to the 2012 assembly.

In separate action, The United Methodist Church in Côte d'Ivoire, the largest regional conference of the worldwide denomination with almost 700,000 members, received its full rights and responsibilities. As a result, United Methodists in the West African country, which has only two delegates at this General Conference, will receive significantly greater representation at future assemblies.

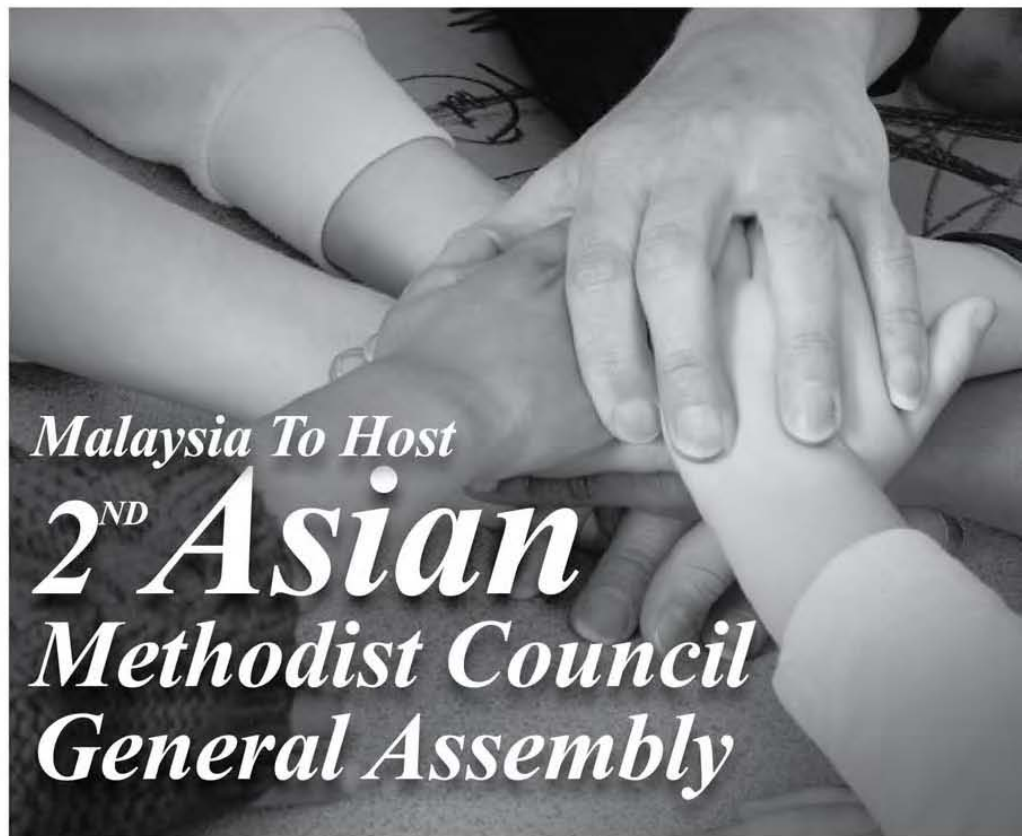
Budget

The delegates approved a \$642 million denominational spending plan for the next four years built around four areas of focus for the immediate future:

- Developing principled Christian leaders.
- Creating new places for new people by starting new congregations and renewing existing ones.
- Engaging in ministries with the poor.
- Improving global health, especially attacking the killer diseases of poverty.

It was the first time the church has developed a budget on an outcome-based model, and church leaders celebrated the collaborative process used to reach a consensus among general agencies and other interests.

This is an abridged version of a longer report. The full article can be found at UMC General Conference site at www.umc.org. Editor



From 24 - 27 June 2008, Malaysia will play host to the 2nd Asian Methodist Convention, which will be held in Johor Bahru. At this Convention the Asian Methodist Council will hold its General Assembly, the highest legislative body of the AMC.

Who is the AMC?

The AMC was formed in 2002 at the 1st Convention held in Seoul, Korea. The founding members of the Council were Korea, Malaysia, Singapore, Taiwan, Hong Kong, India, Indonesia, Myanmar, Philippines and Sri Lanka. Its purpose is to strengthen solidarity, improve co-operation, and facilitate the exchange of information between churches of each country, in order to maximize the vocation of evangelism, education, fellowship and service in Asia, through co-operation in mission, leadership training, education projects, social services & ecumenical solidarity.

What was the motivation for its formation?

In the 1980's the Fellowship of Methodist Bishops took note of the changing face of Asia, and the challenges that will confront the church locally and globally. In February 2001 the Asian Methodist Bishops discussed the need of an Asian Methodist Council at their meeting in

Malaysia. This idea was further affirmed during the Mission Consultation in Singapore in September 2001, whereupon the Bishops' Meeting in February 2002 finally decided to establish the Asian Methodist Council.

This led to the 1st Asian Methodist Convention in Seoul, Korea in June 2002, with then Malaysian Bishop Dr. Peter Chio presiding.

The 2nd AMC General Assembly

The theme for this Convention is "**Let the Light Shine: Uniting Asian Methodists for Mission.**"

The Opening and Closing Services and three Morning Devotions will be taken by respective bishops from participating countries. Two main papers on the theme will be presented.

1. The Identity of the Asian Methodist Church in the 21st Century

By Bishop Robert Solomon

2. The Mission of the Asian Methodist Church in the 21st Century

By Bishop Hwa Yung

Elections for a new Executive Committee of the Council will also take place at this Assembly.

Church agencies mobilise to support China's earthquake victims

Francis Wong

Hong Kong (ENI). Christian communities in mainland China and Hong Kong have offered support and prayers to victims in Sichuan, who have suffered a devastating earthquake, China's worst in 30 years, that has resulted in the deaths of nearly 12 000 people.

The coordinating office of the Geneva-based Action by Churches Together (ACT) International response group said it had received quake information from China's Amity Foundation, the only member of ACT International working extensively in China. Amity reported that communications and transport links were destroyed by the quake, making access to affected areas very difficult.

Amity has deployed staff to Chengdu, 159 kilometres from the quake's centre. The Amity Foundation, an independent voluntary organization set up by Chinese Christians, said relief efforts would focus on sanitation, medicines, food and water, quilts and temporary shelters.

An Amity staff arrived in Chengdu, the provincial capital of Sichuan, five hours after the earthquake, which measured 7.8 on the Richter scale, and which hit south-west China at 2:28 p.m. on 12 May. The Amity officer said he had established contact with local partners and that a disaster relief office would soon be set up in Chengdu.

The Anglican church in Hong Kong and the Hong Kong Christian Council gave donations through the Amity Foundation to support the relief work.

The Hebei-based Faith Press, a Catholic news agency in north China, reported that churches were damaged in various dioceses in Sichuan and that churchgoers had to seek other places to attend Sunday Mass.

Catholic Bishop Han Jide of the Pingliang diocese in Gansu province, north-west China, told the news agency on 13 May he was visiting villages when the earthquake began, and he experienced three minutes of severe shaking. The bishop said that soon after, Christians began to pray for the victims and to plan how to assist those affected by the disaster. A Catholic priest

from province's Tianshui diocese said church buildings were ruined and that a boy who lived there was injured.

In the Wanxian diocese of the Chongqing municipality in south west of China, the coadjutor bishop, He Zeqing, said he was taking a short rest when tremors began.

"When I was rising from my bed, I found that the cross near the window shaking vigorously," said Bishop He. "I ran along the street along with many other people." He found one church member with a broken leg trying in vain to run while carrying a child in his arms, Bishop He told the Faith Press agency.

Hong Kong's Roman Catholic diocese has assigned the local branch of the church's welfare arm Caritas to raise funds for the earthquake victims. It has instructed parishes to collect donations on 25 May and 1 June, after a similar donation campaign to be held on 18 May, for cyclone victims in Myanmar (Burma).

Wang Zhenyao, head of the disaster relief office at China's Ministry of Civil Affairs, said that as of 13 May there were 11 921 dead, and the death toll was likely to rise. The People's Liberation Army had joined the relief work.

South African religious leaders condemn xenophobic killings

David Wanless

Cape Town (ENI). Many South Africans have been shocked by a wave of violence directed against foreigners living in poorer areas around Johannesburg, the country's largest city, during the past week, with condemnation also coming from religious leaders.

Homes have been looted, people have been attacked and killed in what police have described as "orchestrated anarchy". Despite a visit to the Johannesburg suburb of Alexandra by a high powered delegation of provincial and national government leaders, the violence has continued and spread to other areas around the city.

In a statement on 15 May, the general secretary of the South African Council of Churches, Eddie Makue urged people to desist from violence. "As people of faith," he said, "we strongly condemn the use of violence and intimidation, particularly insofar as it is targeted against

strangers and uprooted people.

"Throughout the apartheid era, many of our neighbours welcomed those who had been uprooted by the turmoil in our own land," said the leader of the SACC, which represents Orthodox and Protestant Christians and South Africa's Roman Catholic bishops. "By the grace of God, we are now in the position to do the same for those who have been displaced by contemporary social, political and economic upheavals."

Unofficial estimates suggest as many as four million undocumented foreigners, mainly from people fleeing from hardship and oppression in Zimbabwe, may be living in South Africa.

The South African Jewish Board of Deputies urged foreigners to be treated with "ubuntu", a philosophy of reaching out to those nearby. It said on 16 May it was dismayed by the xenophobic attacks in Johannesburg. "As a people who have been the target of hate crimes, genocide and prejudice for centuries, the Jewish community appeals to all citizens of South Africa to treat the strangers in our land in the great spirit of 'ubuntu'," said Owen Futeran, the chairperson of Cape Town's branch of the Jewish board.

Residents of affected areas have complained on television and radio, and in press interviews, that "foreigners are stealing our jobs". There have also been some allegations that immigrants have bribed officials to get state housing ahead of South Africans. Authorities have suggested that criminal gangs might be taking advantage of the political upheaval.

Local churches and South African police stations have given refuge to those who have been displaced, and church leaders have called for justice and peace in the affected areas. Leaders from SACC member churches in the central Gauteng province are working with local church leaders in Alexandra to provide assistance to those worst affected by the violence, and to address the underlying factors which have given rise to these acts.

The Rev. Gift Moerane, ecumenical secretary for the SACC Gauteng region, referring to the problems of rapidly rising food and fuel prices, urged South Africans not to fall into the "easy trap of making foreign nationals, or any other equally vulnerable group, scapegoats for the difficult and complex problems they are compelled to face".

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PADERI which stands for Pastoral Development and Renewal Initiative comprises of a group of pastors, lay leaders and theologians of various denominations who are concerned for the personal spiritual formation and development of pastors and lay leaders in the Church in Malaysia. This would entail the holistic development of pastors and church leaders in their character, integrity, identity, role and relevance.

This July 15-18 a conference "Run With The Horses" is planned at Bayu Beach Resort Port Dickson. Two international speakers have been invited: Rev. Dr. Sam Kamaleson and Rev. Dr. Tan Siang Yang who will deal with spiritual and character formation of pastors and Christian leaders. Time for discussions, practical and contextual application will also be given.

Rev. Dr. Kamaleson, Methodist minister from south India and has been running international pastors' schools, will speak from Ephesians on the prayer for enlightenment, the prayer of enrichment, and the prayer for equipment in the series "Prayer for Spiritual Leaders!"

Rev. Dr. Tan grew up in Singapore and is now professor of psychology at Fuller Theological Seminary, USA and also the senior pastor at First Evangelical Church, Glendale, California. The social, emotional and psychological dimensions of character formation focused on loving God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength, and loving our neighbour as ourselves will be covered in three plenary sessions.

For more information on the conference contact: Rev. Siew Woh (019-3289198; siewoh@yahoo.com) or Tan Kong Beng (016-3689543; kongbeng7@gmail.com).

Press Statement

by members of Article 11 and Council of Churches

While we are relieved that the Penang Syariah Court has "permitted" Tan Ean Huang who formally converted to Islam in 1988 to "renounce" Islam and practice Buddhism, we have many concerns with this process.

For two years Tan Ean Huang faced many obstacles in asserting her inherent right to practice her own faith as guaranteed by Article 11 of the Federal Constitution. Article 11 grants every person the freedom to practice and profess the religion of his/her choice as does the Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

We agree with the call by civil society that any person wanting to profess and practice his or her religion should not have to face administrative hurdles, enforced counselling and the need to wait for years before his or her faith is officially recognized. Instead, people like Tan Ean Huang should be able to utilise a simple registration process

administered by the National Registration Department to get official recognition of their professed religion.

It has been pointed out that not all Syariah State enactments allow a person to leave Islam. Some seem to permit it, some seem to criminalize it and some seem to be silent about it. As such, there are different consequences if a person wishes to convert out of Islam. There are also those who have never professed or practised Islam, but are officially considered as "Muslim", usually because their parents may have converted in name but continued to raise them in their original non- Muslim faith.

Freedom of religion is a fundamental right. It is a private matter for an individual. The state should not interfere in this unless a religious practice infringes on the rights and liberties of others. We believe that once a person has professed that he/she is no longer a Muslim; the Government should respect that person's wishes. Islamic laws should not thereafter be applied to that person, nor should the Syariah Court have any jurisdiction over that person. Adequate laws ought to be enacted to ensure that religious conversion does not permit a person to evade outstanding obligations to his or her family members, be they Muslim or people of other faiths.

Proposals for such laws have been submitted by JAG (Joint Action Group for Gender

Equality), the Bar Council, the MCCBCHST and other members of civil society.

We therefore strongly urge the government and the judiciary to implement immediately the proposals by civil society to uphold freedom of religion for all Malaysians.

Endorsed by:

1. All Women's Action Society (AWAM)
2. Bar Council Malaysia
3. Catholic Lawyers Society (CLS)
4. Council of Churches
5. Malaysian Civil Liberties Society, Protém Committee (MCLS)
6. National Human Rights Society (HAKAM)
7. Sisters In Islam (SIS)
8. Suara Rakyat Malaysia (SUARAM)
9. Women's Aid Organisation (WAO)

13 May 2008

Article 11 is a coalition of 10 Malaysian NGOs with its secretariat being Women's Aid Organisation and Sisters in Islam. Members of Article 11 are All Women's Action Society (AWAM); Bar Council Malaysia; Catholic Lawyers Society (CLS); Malaysian Civil Liberties Society, Protém Committee (MCLS); Malaysian Consultative Council of Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Sikhism and Taoism (MCCBCHST); National Human Rights Society (HAKAM), Sisters In Islam (SIS); Suara Rakyat Malaysia (SUARAM); Vivekananda Youth Movement, Seremban; Women's Aid Organisation (WAO).

DAVID BOLER

1919 – 2008



Mr David Boler, KMN was a statesman of the Church in Malaysia. He was instrumental in establishing the National Evangelical Christian Fellowship (NECF) in 1983. He served as its first chairman for ten years. After this Mr Boler was chairman of the Christian Federation of Malaysia (CFM) from 1993 – 1995. He also served as chairman of the Bible Society of Malaysia from 1983 – 1988. His passing on 27 April 2008 is a loss for the whole church in Malaysia.

Besides his ecumenical involvement Mr David Boler has given his life and commitment to the local church and to the mission to the schools. He was an elder of Elim Gospel Chapel, Ipoh and then of Petaling Jaya Gospel Hall.

He started teaching at the Anglo-Chinese School, Ipoh in 1953 and became the headmaster of Bukit Bintang Boys' School, Petaling Jaya in 1966 until his retirement in 1978. Through teaching Mr Boler began his life-long association with Scripture Union, serving as its chairman from 1967 – 1998, and continuing as an active advisor after that. In conjunction with this he was involved with the wider mission of the Christian schools through the Malayan Christian Schools Council for 29 years.

In this respect Mr Boler was a staunch advocate of the vital place of our Christian schools in the mission of the Church, regardless of their denominational association. He firmly believed in the important vocation of the Christian teacher and the witness of Christian students to their fellow schoolmates. This is a vision we need to keep alive.



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APPEAL

- Humanitarian Relief for Myanmar

CCM is calling upon all Churches to pray for the thousands of children and families affected by the Cyclone Nargis in Myanmar.

The death toll continues to rise and currently estimated to be 22,000 with over 1 million left homeless.

Secular and church relief agencies are working with the government authorities to rush aid to affected areas.

CCM has been informed that Action of Churches Together (ACT) is working with the Myanmar Council of Churches and local churches to assist in the emergency distribution of food, plastic sheeting for shelter, blankets, tents and water purification tablets.

CCM, along with other churches in the region are raising funds to sustain the humanitarian relief work.

All congregations are invited to make generous donations so that short and long-term relief work will be implemented during this critical time.

Please send the cheques to "Council of Churches of Malaysia" and write "Myanmar Relief Fund" behind the cheque.



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The anniversary logo

Wesley Methodist Church, Sibü celebrated its 50th Anniversary over a five day period from 30 April to 4 May 2008. Members residing in different parts of the world came back. All the pastors who had served in Wesley, including the missionary pastors, were invited to this grand event, though not everyone could come. Still, over 20 former missionaries and their spouses came for the Golden Jubilee. A special logo was designed to commemorate the occasion.

Wesley Methodist Church is one of the English-speaking churches in the SCAC. It began with mostly missionaries who were serving in local churches that used vernacular Chinese dialects. They felt the need for an English service and also Sunday school for their children. They first met under the leadership of Rev. David Macdonald in the Methodist Theological School (MTS) chapel.

WMC was served by part-time missionary pastors as it grew steadily in importance and numbers. In 1970 Rev. Jim Brinks was appointed the first full-time missionary pastor. In 1976, with the formation of the Methodist Church in Malaysia and the renamed Sarawak Chinese Annual Conference, Rev. Peter Chio (now Bishop Emeritus) was appointed the first full-time local pastor. By then many local residents had joined the church and the number of foreign missionaries gradually reduced. Now it is a church for the local residents and the community.

Wesley Golden Jubilee



Early congregation of WMC

Today Wesley Methodist Church can look back and see that the seeds that were sown by some pastors and watered by others have been given growth by God. Wesleyans looked back in thankfulness through the recollections of the early missionary pastors. The local pastors who had served in Wesley also shared their experience and gave exhortations to look ahead and move forward. Many members were encouraged to hear about their history and the developments that have taken place through the years.

A series of events were planned for everyone, visitors as well as local Wesleyans. From 30 April they

visited various Methodist institutions, a longhouse ministry of Wesley church, and some evening meetings. The Jubilee Thanksgiving Dinner was held at the Sibü Civic Centre. The celebrations concluded on the Sunday with two morning services and an evening service taken by Bishop Hwa Yung. Fittingly, the day ended with the opening of the WMC Archive Centre, a record of what God has done in Wesley Methodist Church Sibü the past 50 years.

This is based on reports in Connection (15 May) and the Wesley Golden Jubilee website at wesleyjubilee.wordpress.com



Visitors and members taken around Sibü



Some of the former pastors of WMC.