

Love One Another

A new command I give to you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.

John 13:34-35



Love one another. This was the common message delivered by Bishop Hwa Yung to all the Annual Conferences recently concluded.

He drew attention to Jesus' words to his disciples: "A *new* command I give to you." What was new about this command to love when this was already found in the Old Testament? The newness was in the way Jesus showed his love to us – "As I have loved you."

Jesus' love was demonstrated, firstly, by his humble servanthood shown in the washing of his disciples' feet. None of them were willing to serve one another in this lowly way. Secondly, Jesus' love was expressed by giving his life totally for us, even to death. "Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends." (Jn.15:13)

But there is also another truth in Jesus' words that we often miss, Bishop Hwa Yung pointed out. That is the relation between our love for one another and the effective witness to the world of the reality of God. ***The reality of God is seen in the love within the Church.*** That is the meaning of v. 35 above.

Jesus is not talking about loving the world but the love of Christians for one another. He is not referring to the things and programmes the church can do, important as they are. He is saying when Christians love and care for each other as Jesus loved they exhibit the very kind of love and unity that exist between the Father, Son and Spirit. This is the most effective way to show the concrete reality of God in our midst.

However, to love is a costly thing. To show our love in practical ways will demand much from us. Giving ourselves

to serve each other humbly, to care for the needy and weak, to forgive when we are wronged, to say sorry for our wrongs, to set aside our personal agendas to work together are all costly to us. Yet this is far less than what Jesus has done and we too are called to give our life for one another.

Bishop Hwa Yung then challenged the church to take this command to love seriously, and to be willing to pay the cost as Jesus did. If we are to truly love one another then the world will see a very different church. The world is looking at us and taking note. Will it be possible for people to see what God is like in the transformed lives and the way Christians love and care for one another? ♣

Dedication of Centennial Park

28 November 2006, Sibu

On the first day of the 31st Session Sarawak Chinese Annual Conference, the Centennial Park was officially opened by Bishop Hwa Yung. Part of the dedication ceremony was a procession following the path around the park. It was followed by a Thanksgiving Service and Dinner.

Centennial Park is located on a seven acre piece of land, about fifteen miles from Sibu, donated by Mr. Chang Ching Chii, member of the SCAC. It was built as a memorial landmark to remember the goodness of the Lord in the history of SCAC.

It is a retreat and spiritual formation center. Opened to public since August this year it has already seen over 3000 people use its facilities for camp and personal holidays.

But it is also a spiritual formation center. The Disciple Academy is based at the center where it provides a comprehensive program of courses for the needs of groups and individuals. Structured under two main sections – Character Formation and Competency Building – these courses are geared towards spiritual renewal and reform which together will lead to Church revival. ❖



A Picnic Way To Celebrate Christmas

On 16 December, 2006, Wesley Methodist Church KL held a Christmas celebration that was slightly different from previous years. From 5pm onwards, members came with their own picnic basket and had a picnic in the MBS school field where tents were set up and some tables laid out. The purpose of this picnic was to encourage greater community bonding as well as to reach out to friends in a non-threatening way.

Those who came had a wonderful time. Everyone praised God because it had been raining practically every evening for the past two weeks but on that particular day, God was faithful in holding back the rain.

At about 7.30pm, the picnickers began to make their way to the church sanctuary for the Christmas musical “An Evening of Carols” which began at 8pm. The nativity story was told through music, songs, dance and drama by various groups in the church. The evening ended with the proclamation of God’s glory and reign through the well-loved Hallelujah Chorus from The Messiah by George Frederick Handel.

Susan Tan
Music Director
Wesley KL ❖



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the third day he rose from the dead;



A New Look

A new look for the New Year! We are very happy to introduce the new masthead for Pelita Methodist and a fresh layout to go with it. The masthead uses the traditional colours of blue and gold associated with the Methodist Church in Malaysia.

We hope Pelita Methodist will develop further as one of the vehicles for bringing Methodists in our various Annual Conferences closer together to share in the identity and mission of the Church. So we wish to see more people reading this magazine and in this regard want to encourage more individual subscribers in addition to the support from the churches.

News from the Annual Conferences

This year we also look forward to a historic event for the MCM – the Methodist Prayer Convention at the end of August. In addition to this some Annual Conferences have also planned or continue to develop new programmes and projects for this year. We hope to bring the reports to you readers.

Nurturing Articles

We also plan to provide articles that will build Christian knowledge and also address relevant issues in our contemporary context. We hope to draw on the resources we have in our own Methodist churches as well as the theological schools.

Looking forward to what lies ahead in the New Year.

Christopher Cheah

Executive Editor

Pelita Methodist

Publisher / 出版者
Bishop Dr. Hwa Yung

Chief Editor / 总编辑
Bishop Dr. Hwa Yung

Executive Editor
Mr Christopher Cheah

Editorial Board / 编辑委员会
Rev Ling Heu Uh
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Rev Khon Weng Joo
Mr Wong Meng Lei
Mr Tung Kam Seng
Ms Lily Ung

All correspondence and enquiries to be directed to:

Pelita Methodist
69 Jalan 5/31, 46000 Petaling Jaya
Selangor Darul Ehsan
E-mail • pelita@methodistchurch.org.my
Website • www.methodistchurch.org.my

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ReconRe is an interdenominational voluntary non-profit organization, born out of the concern of God laid upon the hearts of a small group of Christians who share the vision of encouraging the earthly expression of God's reconciliation with man through His Son, Jesus Christ (2 Corinthians 5).

As a catalyst, ReconRe hopes to encourage believers to turn this vision into their mission in their personal, family, social and church life. ReconRe provides retreats in order for one to have a time of reflection and renewal in Christ.

Our Spiritual Directors:

- Dr. Chew Tow Yow – He is a retired Government Education Officer who became an ordained Methodist pastor. He is currently a part-time lecturer in Seminary Theology Malaysia. He is devoted to seeing spiritual formation and to provide silent retreat.
- Rev. Michael Wong - He is a retired ordained Methodist pastor from Singapore. He is now an itinerant preacher who conducts silent retreats.
- Dr Lee Bee Teik – She is a medical practitioner who has given up the profession in order to concentrate on helping others in reconciliation and spiritual transformation. She has written several books and currently conducts counseling and silent retreats in between speaking engagements.

Retreat Schedule for Year 2007

Dates	Theme	Purpose	Number	Location	Spiritual Director	Single room	Twinning
Jan 26 - 29 (Fri - Mon)	Friendship with God	Meeting with God in solitude and silence	10 pax	Reconre Seremban	Dr. Lee Bee Teik	RM 80/day	RM 60/day
Feb 16 - 18 (Fri - Sun lunch)	Be Still, and know I am God	Introduction to Silent Retreat - meeting with God in solitude and silence	20 pax	Reconre Seremban	Dr. Chew Tow Yow	RM 80/day	RM 60/day
Feb 23 - 26 (Fri - Mon)	Friendship with God	Meeting with God in solitude and silence	10 pax	Reconre Seremban	Dr. Lee Bee Teik	RM 80/day	RM 60/day
Mar 13 - 16 (Tue - Fri)	Refreshing my Call	For retreatants to reaffirm their call to ministry	Max 8 pax	Reconre Seremban	Dr. Chew Tow Yow	RM 80/day	RM 60/day
Mar 18 - 23 (Sun - Fri)	Friendship with God for Pastors' Wives	For Pastors' wives to meet with God in solitude and silence	10 pax	Reconre Seremban	Dr. Lee Bee Teik	RM 80/day	RM 60/day
Mar 28 - 31 (Wed - Sat)	Faith and Discipline	For retreatants to understand their intimate relationship with God	20 pax	Reconre Seremban	Rev Michael Wong	RM 80/day	RM 60/day
May 23 - 26 (Wed - Fri)	Faith and Discipline	For retreatants to understand their intimate relationship with God	20 pax	Reconre Seremban	Rev Michael Wong	RM 80/day	RM 60/day
July 3 - 7 (Tue - Sat)	Friendship with God	Meeting with God in solitude and silence	10 pax	Reconre Seremban	Dr. Lee Bee Teik	RM 80/day	RM 60/day
Oct 19 - 21 (Fri-Sun)	Be Still, and know I am God	Introduction to Silent Retreat - meeting with God in solitude and silence	20 pax	Fraser Hill Meth. Centre	Dr. Chew Tow Yow	RM 120/day	RM 80/day
Nov 16 - 18 (Fri-Sun)	Be Still, and know I am God	Introduction to Silent Retreat - meeting with God in solitude and silence	20 pax	Fraser Hill Meth. Centre	Dr. Chew Tow Yow	RM 120/day	RM 80/day

Individual directed retreats (one to one) for seeking the Lord's direction may be arranged.

Please call 06-6332072 to mutually arrange dates and places.

* All location subject to change depending on the number of retreatants.

* Dateline for registration is 1 month before each retreat.

Retreat Registration & Bookings is now open!

Reconre Sdn Bhd (Incorporated in Malaysia; 392098-D)

Postal Address: P. O. Box 91, 70710 Seremban, Negeri Sembilan, Malaysia.

Tel/Fax: +606-633 2072 Email: reconilior@reconre.org Website: <http://www.ReconRe.org>



• Corporate Intercession.



• Listening & Learning.

“Prayer is more important than anything.” TRAC School for Intercessors Part 2

From 3 – 5 Nov., 2006, 48 intercessors from 11 TRAC churches gathered once again at Stella Maris in Penang for the TRAC School for Intercessors Part 2 (SFI 2). It was all the more gratifying to see several youths at the seminar.

We were urged to live a life of total surrender to God (Romans 12:1-2) and be prepared to move into unfamiliar territories with God. The Intercessors were very much encouraged by Ms. Wee Lay Ching's teachings, the worship sessions, the prayer times and the moving of the Holy Spirit during the weekend.

We are likened to the “voice of one calling in the desert: Prepare the way for the Lord;” (Isaiah 40:3a). Therefore, God is hastening us to be serious about prayer as our battle is

not against flesh and blood but against the powers and principalities of the heavenly realms (Ephesians 6:12).

The Methodist pioneers were men of prayer. John Sung was also a great man of prayer. He wrote, “In the past, I deemed evangelism the most important work but now I see that prayer is more important than anything. The realm of the Spirit is limitless I have seen some evangelistic teams falter and fall away after many years, the reason is they emphasized their work rather than prayer...”

At the final session, the TRAC President, Rev. Ong Hwai Teik urged us to always get closer to God and walk in obedience to Him, citing King Hezekiah as an example. It had been a very exciting and fulfilling weekend

and many of us left, wishing we had more time to spend together.

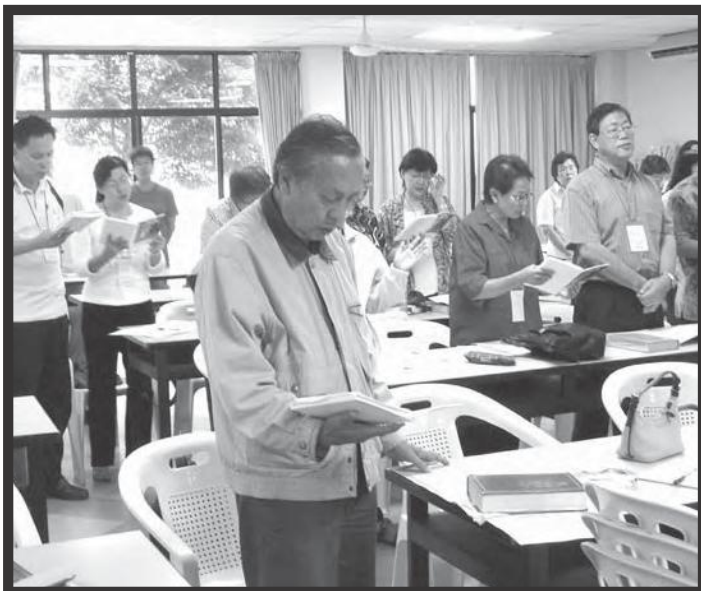
All glory and praise to our loving and faithful God!

Doreen Yeoh
Wesley MC Kuala Lumpur

“In the past, I deemed evangelism the most important work but now I see that prayer is more important than anything. The realm of the Spirit is limitless I have seen some evangelistic teams falter and fall away after many years, the reason is they emphasized their work rather than prayer...” John Sung



• Ministry through prayer.



• Worship in songs.

“All Praise to Our Redeeming Lord”

31st Session Trinity Annual Conference

18 - 21 November 2006, Kuantan



As I reflect on the 31st Session, ATRAC, certain phrases in Charles Wesley's hymn **“All Praise to Our Redeeming Lord”** come to mind. Indeed, we want to give all praise to our redeeming Lord for a Spirit-led conference. The business sessions, elections, and teaching sessions were conducted smoothly and many will concur that there was the Lord's presence and a sense of greater unity among all present at this conference.

Unity in Fellowship

According to that hymn, it is the Lord **‘who joins us by his grace, and bids us, each to each restored.’** This was highlighted by the President in his address where he stated that “we must never stop growing in our fellowship and overcoming relational barriers.” He elaborated that there must be “the highest level of fellowship in the Holy Spirit, so that we can individually and communally practice and experience sincerity, healing, humility, honesty, mercy, forgiveness, confession, restitution and then ‘synergy through unity.’”

The Bishop Dr. Hwa Yung at the ordination service also touched on unity in the sermon entitled **“Love One Another.”** The world is looking at the church and if people see love and unity, they see the reality of God. The call is for Christ's love to be at work in our midst where we are willing to give of ourselves in humble service, to love the weak, to forgive others and be able to say ‘I'm sorry.’

Conference Lay Leaders

Dr. Samuel Ong Boon Leng was elected Conference Lay Leader, Mr. Peter Desmond Wee and Mrs. Judy Chin Associate Conference Lay Leaders. Dr. Chan Kook Weng served as Conference Lay Leader for three terms during which he gave invaluable support to the TRAC President. Dr. Chan's cheerful disposition, positive attitude and rock solid confidence in the Lord's providence and goodness, helped tremendously during difficult times in TRAC. He continues to serve in the Executive Board.

The Last, the Least and the Lost

In the President's Opening Communion Service message entitled **“Inerasable Image, Unchanging Worth”**, he reminded us that God's inerasable love is implanted in us and we have that love connection with Christ that cannot be disconnected. Being thus connected, we are capable of giving that love to others, especially to “the last, the least and the lost.”

With that emphasis, Rev. Pax Tan from Malaysian Care enlightened us on the ministries of this parachurch organization with 64 full-time staff. It is involved in awareness programmes of HIV/AIDS and Prison/Drug Ministry, leadership training and the Orang Asli project called ‘Ladang M-Care’ near Kampar. The latter is a project aimed at improving the lot of the orang asli by teaching them better methods of husbandry and agriculture. Rev. Pax Tan rightly emphasized that we do not have to reinvent the wheel. Our churches can partner with Malaysian Care in carrying out God's Kingdom work.



Rev. Ong praying for the Conference Lay Leaders



A word of appreciation to Dr. John Ng



The Power of Mentoring

Dr. John Ng from Eagles Communication conducted three lively, informative sessions on 'mentoring'. Our Lord Jesus Christ showed the importance of mentoring for even though he ministered to many, he focused on a few, changing them through the method of deliberate and intentional mentoring. We are called to follow the example of Christ's life and work while taking on the same qualities that characterized his perfect life.

Dr. John Ng defined mentoring as "a trust and synergistic relationship that seeks to support and develop individuals in their personal growth to be God-centered persons, helping them in holistic personal development and improved performance." To be most effective as mentors, let us remember to develop the same qualities that characterized Christ's perfect life

ourselves – honesty, gentleness, self-discipline, strong communication, encouragement, servanthood, the willingness to confront and love.

The conference sessions may have been tiring and energy sapping at times but it was always a joy to see and hear the love and grace of God flowing in and through our TRAC churches. It was also a joy to meet and fellowship with those whom we get to meet only once a year.

"And if our fellowship below in Jesus be so sweet, what height of rapture shall we know when round his throne we meet!"

Lily Ch'ng

TRAC and Pelita Methodist
Board Member ❖

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MALAYSIAN FLOODS APPEAL

We know from information of our newspapers that devastating floods are affecting many states in our country.

Hundreds of families are affected and there is a great loss to property.

In view of the current situation, the Executive Committee of the Council of Churches of Malaysia, calls upon all churches celebrating Christmas to

offer intercessory prayers for families affected and for agencies involved in humanitarian relief.

The CCM also calls upon churches to take up special offerings. Monies received will go towards humanitarian relief and restoration of buildings affected.

All monetary donations should be channeled to the CCM Relief Fund.

Cheques should be designated: "Council of Churches of Malaysia" with the words "Malaysian Floods Appeal" written at the back of the cheque.

Tan Sri Bishop Dr. Lim Cheng Ean

The Executive Committee
Council of Churches of Malaysia
22nd December 2006

31st Session Trinity Annual Conference

Open Heavens, Global Missions

Some Highlights from the President's Address

Rev. Ong Hwai Teik explained the vision statement *"Open Heavens, Global Missions"* as referring to God rending open the heavens and the coming of the Spirit upon Jesus at his baptism, and at Pentecost the Spirit's empowering the church for global missions.

The whole statement includes the theme *"Transforming, Redeeming, Abiding, Community (TRAC) in Christ"* which gives a "snapshot" of what TRAC is to be like, as God's people indwelt by the presence of the Holy God.

The Five Essentials

This statement of vision and mission is worked out in the **Five Essentials** that have been identified as areas for development: Leadership Development, Building Community, Missions and Outreach, Discipleship & Spirituality, Family: Children, Youth & Seniors Ministries.

There is much to be thankful for over the last five years – the growth in the prayer movement, progress is evangelism through avenues like the Alpha Program, a greater synergy and focus in missions, growth of outreach work to at least four ethnic migrant communities, advance in Youth ministries through the Jeremiah School and YLDP, leadership empowering in LPL trained leaders and supply pastors.

Barriers to the "Wind"

At the same time Rev. Ong raised concerns that could become barriers to the "wind" of the Holy Spirit. Some of these were his observations from his visits to the different churches and Districts.

- **A distracted agenda**

TRAC must not forget to "keep our main business the main business" – that is the ministry of reconciling people to the living God, as Christ's ambassadors.

- **Relational barriers**

The importance of the highest quality of fellowship in unity, sincerity, humility, mercy, forgiveness and mutual submission should characterize the people of God.

- **Institutional and dynamic community**

To be aware of the maintenance mentality and "risk averse" culture of institutionalism that can stifle initiatives and outreach to groups outside the established institution. Soul cultivation must precede institution building.

- **The "modern problems" of overwork, relativism and consumerism**

The secular world deceives us to think our identity, meaning and satisfaction lie only in our work and in the status given us by the things we possess. Hence the predominance of a culture of overwork (not the same as hard work), and a consumerist lifestyle that become an idol in place of God and service to Him.

Heading into 2007

Rev. Ong then shared some important issues TRAC should work towards 2007.

- **Church Planting in urban areas**

Go to where the people are setting up "shop-lot size" churches that "will be most sustainable ... in terms of cost, every member participation, manageable leadership and administration."

- **A Vibrant Prayer Movement**

This will under gird the desire for renewal and revival in Malaysia. To encourage every church in intercession by appointing a prayer coordinator, developing the School

for Intercessors syllabus, training and networking.

- **Global Missions**

To strengthen Annual Conference level organization to enable greater synergized involvement by churches through combined missions exposure, taking on projects and mission work in the adopted countries, and co-support sent out missionaries.

- **Our Christian Family Life**

In the face of widespread breakdown of family life, it is crucial to acknowledge the struggles in the domestic realm and build up this core basic unit of our social fabric. A strong Christian family will not only make a strong family of Christ in the local church but it is essential for effective and credible witness to the world.

- **Establishing Ministry Centers**

These centers for the "least, last and lost" are expressions of integral and holistic mission of transformation as the proclamation and demonstration of the gospel. This is to continue in the way of social holiness as taught by John Wesley.

- **Institute for Christian Ministry**

This is to be a national (TRAC) training vehicle that can coordinate the programs across the Boards, provide integrated training in alignment to the goals of the AC, utilizing and pooling the resources and processes for collective training and empowering.

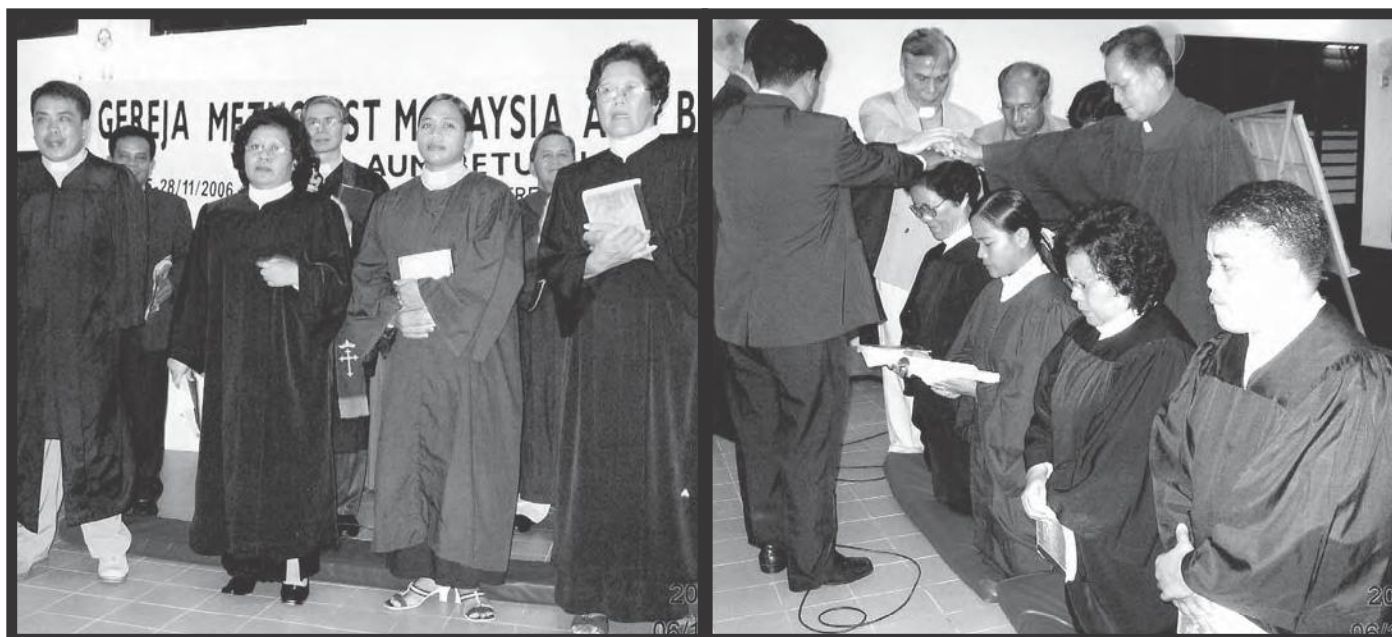
These plans and programs are made effective as "open heavens" are sought in the coming and presence of the Holy Spirit. ✚

31st Session Sarawak Iban Annual Conference

• 25-27 November 2006 •



• Conference delegates with Bishop Hwa Yung



• Newly ordained Elders

Front row from left:

Rev. Asson ak Ulli, Rev. Susan Tunsang ak Baok,
Rev. Irene ak Nili and Rev. Tiong ak Unjong

• Ordination of the new Elders

31st Session Sarawak Chinese Annual Conference

• 28 Nov – 1 Dec 2006, Sibü

Ordination of Elders and Deacons

One of the memorable occasions of any Annual Conference is the ordination of pastors. This is not so only for the specific individuals concerned and their family members, but it is also a time for the whole church to rejoice in this recognition of those who have given their lives to serve the Lord.

Four Elders and five Deacons were ordained by Bishop Hwa Yung during the 31st Session SCAC on 29th November in Masland Church, Sibü. A choir comprising almost 100 pastors sang an anthem during the service.

Rev. Dr. Su Chii Ann, President of SCAC, reminded the newly ordained pastors to be faithful to the calling. "A pastor has a very honourable name," he said.

Using the text from 1 Thess. 2:1-13, Rev. Su spoke of the three names that pastors bear: Apostles of Christ, Gentle Mothers, Encouraging Fathers.

Commissioning Missionaries

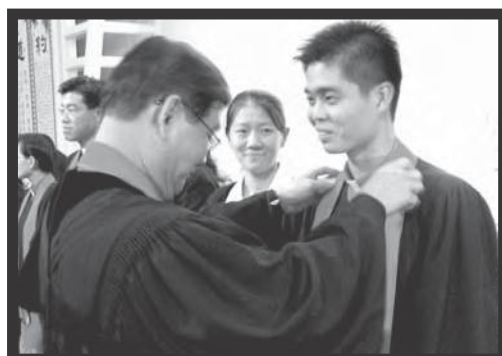
Four long term overseas missionary and one local missionary were commissioned during the Annual Conference. The local missionary will be teaching the Penan children at Pa Adang. She was a kindergarten teacher for four years.

Two of the long term missionaries will serve in Cambodia, one a retired teacher and the other worked as an administrator for thirteen years. The other two is a couple newly married who will be serving in North Africa.

New Conference Leaders

Among the newly elected Conference leaders were Mr. Ting Kong Siin the Annual Conference Secretary General; Mr. Hii Ching Chiong, the Conference Lay Leader; Mr. Chang Jih Ren and Dr. Wong Sung Ging, the 1st and 2nd Associate Lay Leader respectively.

Compiled from *Connection*
15 December 2006 ✚



From top to bottom : Commissioning the missionaries / Newly ordained Elders & Deacons / Rev. Su Chii Ann and Rev. Tony Chieng



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Disciples in Missions

• Highlights from the President's Address •

Rev. Dr. Su Chii Ann gave a brief overview of the past year in the ministry areas of prayer, Bible study, evangelism, missions and stewardship. He shared about meeting one church member who has read the Bible *96 times*, and encouraged everyone to study the Bible at least once in the coming year.

One highlight to note is the 22 missionaries the Conference has sent overseas. Rev. Su spoke of the target for 50 missionaries to be commissioned by 2010. This target can be met by raising 6-7 more missionaries each year.

Rev. Su attributed the strength and growth of the church to the unique connectional system of the Methodist Church. He called for the continued appreciation and practice of such a system because it enables a strong network and relationship between the members, local church, Districts,

Annual Conference and General Conference. The church is one, supporting and working together to accomplish the task God has entrusted to her.

Looking Ahead to 2007-2008

Drawing on the GC quadrennial theme Rev. Su proposed the theme "Disciples in Missions" for the next two years. The focus is on both discipleship in the church membership and encouraging them for missions.

How can this be done? What strategies are to be adopted? Rev. Su highlighted some of these.

- New converts are to understand they are starting a new Christian pilgrimage, to grow from baptism class, confirmation class and a 3-year TOP program for discipleship.

- Church members will be urged to take the Disciple 1,2,3 and 4 courses.

- Part of this building of discipleship will be participating in short or long term missions. After these mission trips they can be organized into Covenant Discipleship Groups.

- In this focus the strategy is a people-oriented ministry, winning, nurturing, building up and training people first rather than physical development.

Rev. Su ended with some suggestions on how some ministries of the churches can have a greater impact by extending their services and training to other Districts, thereby enlarging the scope of their ministry. ❀



Faith to Live By:

An Exposition of the Apostles' Creed

Roland Chia

Dr. Roland Chia is Dean of Postgraduate Studies and Lecturer in Historical and Systematic Theology at Trinity Theological College, Singapore.

10. Resurrection

the third day he rose from the dead;

During the closing decades of the eighteenth century, a German historian Hermann Samuel Reimarus wrote a treatise rejecting the Gospel account of the resurrection of Jesus Christ because of its incredulity to reason. Reimarus spoke on behalf of many philosophers and intellectuals of his day who subjected not only the Church's dogmas but the Bible itself to scrutiny under the reductive lenses of rationalism and scepticism.

Reimarus fabricated an ingenious theory in an attempt to explain the rationale of the resurrection narratives in the gospels. He argued that Jesus' disciples, realising that there was a better living to be made from preaching than fishing (if this were true, their misjudgement was catastrophic!), invented the story about the resurrection of Jesus. This story, which falls in line with Jewish expectations of the resurrection, enabled the disciples to embark on what was potentially a lucrative line of business. According to Reimarus, the disciples of Christ were nothing but clever con-artists who concocted what might now be called an 'urban legend' surrounding the person of Christ by taking advantage of Jewish apocalyptic expectations.

Suspicion about the resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth, of course, did not originate either with Reimarus or the sceptics of the Enlightenment. They are found in the gospel accounts themselves. The chief priests and Pharisees were afraid that the disciples

might steal the body of their Master from the tomb and then claim that he had risen from the dead. Thus, in Matthew's account, the chief priests and Pharisees went to Pilate to request that the tomb be guarded until the third day after Jesus' crucifixion and death (Matthew 27:60-63). Like Reimarus, the chief priests and the Pharisees also thought that the disciples would resort to deception to advance their cause.

Although scripture clearly presents the *facticity* of Christ's resurrection, its portrayal of the *nature* of the Risen One remains enigmatic, shot through with paradox. This is because the resurrection signals the coming of the future into human history. The resurrection of Christ is unique: it is not a species in a genus. Rather it is *sui generis*.

Other theories to refute the resurrection of Christ have since been suggested. One speculated that Jesus did not die on the Cross, but that he swooned, and later revived in the cool of the tomb. But this theory is untenable because if Jesus had only swooned, signs of life would have been detected when his body was being embalmed. It would also be inconceivable for a man who is barely alive to have disentangled the long winding of the grave clothes, rolled the large stone from inside the grave and escaped.

Even those who remain sceptical about the resurrection fail to find these attempts to refute it convincing. The incredulity of the presuppositions

behind these theories is eloquently refuted by a Jewish scholar, Joseph Klausner: 'That is impossible; deliberate imposture is not the substance out of which the religion of millions of mankind is created ... The nineteen hundred years' faith of millions is not founded on deception'.

The resurrection of Jesus is the foundation upon which the Christian Faith is erected. Here is how the Church's earliest theologian put it: 'For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the scriptures, and that he appeared to Peter, and then to the Twelve' (1 Cor. 15:3). And again: 'if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith'.

All the gospel narratives emphasised the fact of the resurrection of Jesus, and the Church has always and everywhere proclaimed it. Although scripture clearly presents the *facticity* of Christ's resurrection, its portrayal of the *nature* of the Risen One remains enigmatic, shot through with paradox. This is because the resurrection signals the coming of the future into human history. The resurrection of Christ is unique: it is not a species in a genus. Rather it is *sui generis*.

The discontinuous nature of the resurrected body of Christ is brought out by the fact that neither the two disciples on Emmaus road (Luke

24:16), nor Mary Magdalene (John 20:14) could immediately recognise it. Its discontinuous nature is further brought out by the fact that the risen Christ appears not to be bound by space and time. He is able to suddenly vanish (Luke 24:37) or appear (John 20:19, 26) at will. These discontinuities notwithstanding, there are important continuities, which signal the fact that it is the Jesus who died three days before on Golgotha's cross who is now risen.

Thomas touched the wounds of his crucifixion (John 20:17). The Church's belief in a bodily resurrection is also founded upon the physicality of the Risen Saviour – although it is a transfigured physicality which Paul enigmatically calls a 'spiritual body'.

Whatever may have been the nature of Jesus' resurrected body, when it was revealed to them that their Master had risen from the dead, the disciples responded in worship. Thus when the women returning from the tomb met the risen Jesus, they took hold of his feet and worshipped him (Matt. 28:9). Similarly, when the disciples met Jesus on the hill-top in Galilee, they worshipped him when they saw him (Matt. 28:17). And Thomas, having put his fingers on the wounds of Jesus, cried aloud: 'My Lord and my God' (John 20:28). The encounter with the resurrected Lord emboldened a small group of men who were previously anxious about their own safety to be powerful witnesses of their Lord.

What is the significance of the resurrection of Christ? The resurrection of Christ points to the triumph of both God and man. Because of the resurrection, God did not humble himself in vain in his Son. In the resurrection, God confirmed his own glory and acted for his own honour. In the resurrection, God's mercy has triumphed in his humiliation, and God's Son Jesus Christ is exalted.

But in the resurrection man's triumph is also secured. By rising from the grave, Jesus Christ has set man free from the fetters of sin and death. As author and finisher of our faith, Christ in his resurrection has paved the way for his people: those who believe in him will also overcome death and

participate in the divine glory. Thus the Easter message is a message of reconciliation, and man's redemption.

Easter also announces the defeat of our enemies – God's enemies. The resurrection of Christ signals the resounding victory of God over sin and death. To be sure, sin and death continue to pervade our world. Sin and death still behave as though the war is on. There is still some shooting here and there, and the presence of enemy troops can be spotted and can still cause damage. But the resurrection points us to the fact that the battle has been won, and the war is at an end.

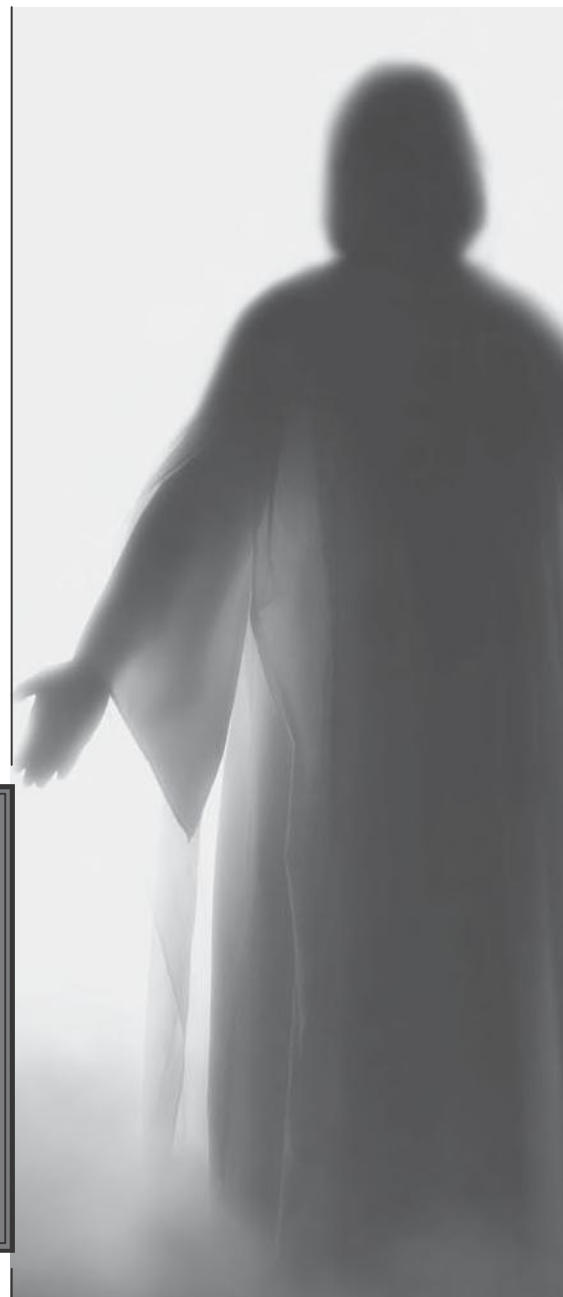
The resurrection of Christ points us to the consummation of the kingdom of God when all evil will be completely and finally removed and the resplendent glory of God will radiate on earth and in the heavens. In this way, the resurrection of Christ is the basis of our hope: Christ has died, Christ is risen, (and thus) Christ will come again!

We end as we had begun, by turning to the eighteenth century. The acids of Enlightenment scepticism, so starkly exemplified by Reimarus' christology, have failed to destroy the fabric of the Christian Tradition despite its large following. In that same century, the voices of orthodoxy continue to proclaim the resurrection of Christ without diminution and compromise. This is found in the theology and music of Johann Sebastian Bach, who in the closing chorus of his magnificent Easter Oratorio (*BWV* 249), which was performed in Leipzig on Easter Sunday 1735, could resonate with the resurrection faith of the apostles by declaring:

Laud and thanks
Shall always be, O Lord, thy song
of praise.
Hell and devil are now
vanquished,
And their portals are destroyed.
Triumph, O ye ransomed voices,
Till ye be in heaven heard.
Spread open, ye heavens, your
glorious arches,
The Lion of Judah with triumph
shall enter!

The reverberation of this Faith will continue to be heard in the twenty-first century and beyond in the midst of scepticism and against the stone walls of unbelief. For truth is more powerful than unbelief, life more powerful than death! ✚

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News in Brief

Barna's Most Significant Faith Findings

A most interesting report can be found in the Christian Post (www.christianpost.com/section/church). It reports what researcher George Barna in the United States considered the twelve "most noteworthy outcomes" from his religious surveys conducted throughout 2006.

Here are some of the findings that may be of interest and surprising to us here although his findings relate to religious faith in the United States.

- Large majorities of the public claim to be "deeply spiritual" and consider their faith to be "very important" yet only 15 percent of those who regularly attend church ranked their relationship with God as the top priority in their life.
- Three out of every four teenagers have taken part in at least one type of psychic or witchcraft-related activity, the most common being using the Ouija board, reading books on witchcraft, playing games involving sorcery, having their palms read or fortunes told.

- The notion of personal holiness is no longer a prominent part of the vast majority of Christians' consciousness. Large numbers of adult Christians have no idea what "holiness" means and only one out of three believe God expects people to become holy.
- Most Americans during their teens have been actively involved in a youth group for a period of time. However, in tracking these young people Barna discovered that most of them no longer engage in organized religion during their twenties.
- Five of the highest-profile Christian leaders – Rick Warren, Joel Osteen, James Dobson, Tim LaHaye and T.D. Jakes – were unknown to a majority of the general population. Most of those leaders were also unknown to most born again Christians.

The complete list can be found in the article in the Christian Post website which also includes Barna's interpretation of their significance.

Methodist Church in Britain Dying

This was the headline in a news report in Christian Today (www.christiantoday.com/church).

Senior researcher at the Manchester University's School of Social Sciences, Dr. David Voas, found that Sunday attendance dropped from 289,400 in 2005 to 278,700 in 2006. This was part of a trend already showing in the past nine years.

The Methodist Church closed 264 churches between 1998 and 2005, more than any other denomination, and attendance declined 25 percent during the same period. In terms of attendance it is behind the Church of England and the Roman Catholic Church.

However, this is not true across all churches. Some, like the Pentecostals have seen an increase, and they provide "an important source of growth in the context of the national decline in church attendance," said Dr. Voas. ✝



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In collaboration with the Christian Federation of Malaysia

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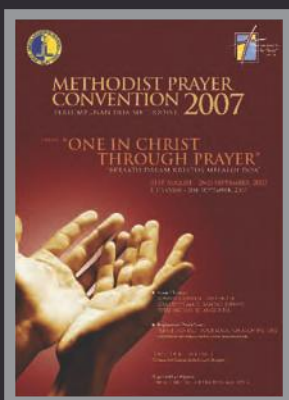
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One in Christ Through Prayer

• Methodist Prayer Convention 2007 •

This historic gathering of Methodists in Malaysia is eight months away. As the planning and arrangements gather pace *Pelita Methodist* will post information and updates on the Convention. This month we introduce the three plenary speakers.



Dr. Samuel T. Kamaleson
*retired Vice President-at-Large,
World Vision International*

Dr. Kamaleson is a well known pastor, evangelist and international speaker from India. He served in the Methodist Church of Southern Asia from 1961 to 1974. He has won recognition from Methodist bodies for his ministry as an Evangelist.

He has served as Vice President in various divisions of World Vision International – the Pastors' Conferences and Special Ministries and Evangelism and Leadership Enhancement – and until his retirement as Vice-President-at-Large.

Dr. Kamaleson will take two plenary sessions in English – *Prayer* and *Repentance*. ✝

Rev. Morley Lee
*General Secretary, CCCOWE
(Chinese Coordination Centre
of World Evangelism.)*

Pastor Morley Lee grew up in both China and Taiwan. He served with the Campus Evangelical Fellowship (CEF) in Taiwan for 14 years as General Secretary and Director of Training, after which he was the senior pastor at the Chinese Bible Church of Greater Boston for 18 years.

From 1995 Rev. Lee has been involved in promoting cross-cultural missions in South East Asia with Christian Mission Overseas (as General Secretary and Field Director) and founded Care Ministries to promote World Mission among Chinese churches.

From August 2006 he was appointed General Secretary of CCCOWE, helping to mobilize Chinese churches for world evangelization.

Rev. Lee will take two plenary sessions in Chinese – *Reconciliation & Unity* and *Revival*. ✝



Dr. Patrick Fung
*General Director, Overseas Missionary
Fellowship International (OMF)*

Dr. Fung specialized in internal medicine and served in Hong Kong. He did Christian Studies at the China Graduate School of Theology and Missiology at Fuller Theological Seminary.

In 1989 he and his wife, a consultant gynecologist, joined OMF International. In 1996 Dr. Fung was appointed director of OMF Hong Kong that involved mobilizing students and graduates, and training church congregations for mission. In 2001 he was appointed OMF International Director for Mobilization based in Singapore.

In 2006 Dr. Fung became the first Asian General Director of OMF International in its 140-year history.

Dr. Fung will take one plenary session in Chinese – *Missions*.

All plenary sessions will be translated simultaneously from English to Chinese and vice versa. There will also be arrangements for translations into Tamil and Iban on the side. ✝