

The Vine

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Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ Jesus. The Church Retreat has come and gone. What was the one thing that was highlighted from this time together? **We are family.** Yes, many of the youths and adults felt a sense of belonging to a family in JCC. Isn't that what the New Testament church is all about? (see Eph 3:15, Gal 6:10, 1Peter 4:17) If this is our strong point, then let us improve on it.

What is the difference between a retreat and a normal Sunday? The main difference I noted was that after every talk, the people were grouped together to share and discuss on questions related to the theme. Could this be the reason people felt a bonding? Because they had a time to share their feelings and thoughts about the talk. Could this be applied to Sunday services?

Moving along, JCC has just celebrated its 36th Anniversary. We have come a long way. Yet some of us think that we have stagnated or worse, on the decline. Which camp do you fall into? In your personal life, how many persons have you brought to Christ? I remember some years back when Bishop John Tan urged that each member of JCC should bring a friend, relative, neighbor or colleague to join the church. By doing that, JCC would automatically grow by 100%. Have we done our part? If JCC has not grown, we know what we can do to change the situation.

One complaint I always hear is that the service is too

long. I wonder how those who attend service at Suntec City feel? They waste at least half an hour queuing up outside the auditorium. Do they find their service too long?

Another observation that seem strange to me is that when there is a combined service and the church is packed to the full, it is usually the English section members who feel uncomfortable. They are so used to a half-empty hall that they prefer not to attend service if it is going to be so packed. How then can God fill up our service if we leave when it is too full?

In God's time, let us be so full that there will be a queue of people lining up along Tah Ching Road to get in.

The Editor

A Family of God

Jurong Christian Church and its Pastors over 36 years of history (Part I)

Information compiled by Lau Se Ping



China, the prize field while Southeast Asia, a temporary base

In order to understand the origin of our church, we have to go back to the Protestant missionary era in China. Christian missionaries had tried to penetrate China, beginning in the late 16th century, when the Jesuits reached China. During the 17th century, French, Portuguese, Spanish, and Italian missionaries of the Dominican, Franciscan and Jesuit Orders consolidated their hold on the Catholic Church in China. However, bitter disputes arose among the various Orders in China and their superiors back in Europe. There were clashes over the controversial question of the universal Chinese practice of ancestor worship, and whether Christianity could 'accommodate' this. There followed a period of persecution in China during which time many missionaries and their converts were exiled, imprisoned, or killed outright.

The emperors of the Manchu dynasty, which began their rule in 1644, adopted an increasingly hostile attitude towards all Westerners and their religions until, in the 18th century, imperial edicts forbidding Christian worship were issued and all rights of foreign trade and residence were confined to the southern port of Canton (Guangdong). Canton thus became the first centre of the Protestant mission movement in China.

Despite these initial missionary efforts, open missionary activities in China were difficult. An Imperial Edict issued in 1813 had forbidden the printing of Chinese literature and the conversion of the Chinese people. The foothold in Canton then was a precarious one and the missionaries were always in danger of being banished at short notice. The newly commissioned Protestant missionaries were instructed by their respective missionary societies to occupy various other centers around China in South-East Asia. This was when cities like Singapore, Penang, Malacca and Batavia (now Jakarta) became important. They were used as bases from which the missionaries could reach out to Chinese emigrants who lived there. It was hoped that they could in turn influence their fellow Chinese when they returned to China. Southeast Asia was viewed only as a base to build a 'wall of light' around China. This period was a time of preparation as the missionaries waited and prayed for China to open her doors to the gospel.

Then in 1842, the opening of China as the missionaries had been patiently waiting for happened. The Treaty of Nanking, signed between Britain and China on 29 August at the end of the Opium War, forced China to open five ports, Canton, Amoy, Fuchow, Ningpo and Shanghai. Within the limits of these ports, foreigners could reside and pursue their trade, whether it be the preaching of the gospel or the continued import of opium. Taking

advantage of the opening of China in this manner, all missionaries residing in Southeast Asia decided to close all their stations and there was a great exodus of missionaries to China.

This great zealous rush to China after 1842 generated far-reaching consequences for the ministry in Singapore and elsewhere in Southeast Asia. Much Christian work, some of which was just about to take root, was virtually abandoned. China had always been the original objective of the missionary agencies; the prize mission field; and Southeast Asia was only a temporary transit station

Just before and after the turn of the 20th century, like the others, several Lutheran missions like the American Lutheran Mission, the Finnish Missionary Society, the Augusta Synod Mission, and the Norwegian Missionary Society also established themselves in central China. In 1951, the Lutheran Church in China had more than 700 congregations, with 180 pastors and 1,000 evangelists and Bible women. Then the door to China was once again closed when the Communist People's Republic of China was established on 1 October 1949. The Lutheran missionaries also left China; many went back to America and Europe, but some went to Formosa (now Taiwan) and Hong Kong.



Lutheran early missions in Malaya and Singapore in the 50s and early 60s

In January 1952, noting the pessimistic turn of events in China and recognizing the vast opportunity for evangelistic work among the Chinese in Malaya, the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) together with Tamil Evangelical Lutheran Church (TELC) in India, investigated the feasibility of starting organized Lutheran work among the Chinese. In 1955, three German missionaries – Rev Hermann Hofmeister, Rev Wilhelm Weickum and Rev Fredrich Schmitt – arrived in Malaya. Also on the same ship were two American missionaries – Rev Helmut Matzat and Rev John Nelson who came with his wife Elizabeth ('Betty Lou').

John Robert Nelson was born in 1930 in Kansas, America, and grew up in a Christian family, going to church and Sunday school in his early life. His mother was Roman Catholic and his father, a mail carrier, was Lutheran. The young Nelson responded to a call to full-time ministry as a teenager at a church camp. He started out to be a chemical engineer and had taken a number of technical courses before switching to a theological course. In college, he met Betty Lou, whose parents were in India where she had grown up. Betty Lou became a fifth generation



missionary. After they were married, both John and Betty Lou made up their minds to be missionaries and had applied to go to India, Hong Kong and Japan, in that order, but they got a call from the mission board to go to Malaya instead. Nevertheless, the Nelsons accepted the call and in 1955, they arrived in Malaya.

The five years from 1955 to 1960 have seen the Lutheran mission in Malaya grow from 3 tiny clusters of preaching points to a thriving mission established in 17 different villages, towns and cities. 1960 saw the Lutheran Church of Malaya (LCM) expanding into Singapore. The Lutheran mission built a church at Duke's Road in memory of the late Mrs Periyanyagam Ammal who donated the land. In 1963, the Board of World Missions (BWM) approved funds for the Malaya mission to purchase a tract of land in Queenstown, a high-rise housing estate, as a site for a second church.

The dedication of JCC in 1968 and its early difficult years



Rev. Daniel Nelsson. Ordained pastor since 1963. Trained social worker from Sweden. Welfare work in Hongkong 1950-1963.

In late 1966, following the successes of the Queenstown and Redeemer congregations, the Jurong Christian Church and Civic Centre was opened. Financed under a grant from BWM and the Brot fur die Welt ('Bread for the World') organization, the church was built on the huge 9,000-acre government-developed satellite industrial community of Jurong. There were 47 completed factories at that time, with another 16 under construction. 3 residential communities were being developed, providing accommodation for up to 25,000 workers and their families. The LCM leadership had hoped that this

new church in Jurong would be opened as an ecumenical project. Earlier, in March 1966, LCM had made an appeal to all non-Lutheran church organizations inviting them for an ecumenical involvement in terms of either personnel or funds.



Ms Anita Ewing, B.S. in Home Economics Education from Indiana University Pennsylvania 1966. Teaches English, Sewing, Cooking, and various activities.

In June 1966, *John Nelson* took up pastoral responsibilities on a part-time basis, working out of Queenstown, and in September the same year, *Paul Chong* was also assigned to Jurong as an evangelist and youth worker. On 6 February 1967, Anita Ewing arrived to join the non-pastoral staff and on 3 May 1967, a Swedish Lutheran pastor, *Daniel Nelsson*, was seconded from Malaysia as the senior pastor of the work, relieving Nelson.



The idea was for Nelsson to concentrate on the English work while Paul concentrated on the Chinese

Paul Chong graduated from the Lutheran Bible Institute, Petaling Jaya 1964.

work. In July 1968, the new church building was dedicated,

and a month later, the church council appointed Ewing as the first coordinator of the Civic Centre. In April 1969, *Chin Tao Sum* arrived to replace Chong. Ewing eventually left in September 1969. In May 1970, Nelsson went on furlough prior to leaving Lutheran Church in Malaysia and Singapore (LCMS) and was replaced by *David Danielson*. On 1 January 1972, Chin was assigned worker-in-charge by LCMS. In February the same year, Danielson resigned. To replace him, *John Nelson* was once again assigned to Jurong, in June 1972, this time full-time.

Ecumenical in membership, people from other churches were allowed to be members of the Jurong church without being Lutherans. The membership then was made up of Lutherans, Anglicans, Mar Thomas Syrians (P.S. George was one of the pioneers), Methodists, and others. The idea of an ecumenical church, at least at congregational level, appeared to be workable because it resulted in some strong leaders in the congregation and the church grew rapidly. It also advanced the idea of community service through a variety of recreational programmes, tuition classes and the development of community leadership. In 1969, the Jurong church was described in convention as the fastest growing in LCMS.

The growth of the Jurong Christian Church, however, was not without pain. When the church building was completed in 1968, and dedicated on 28 July the same year, the church council, with the blessings of LCMS, allowed a part of its premises to be used as a Civic Centre by the Singapore Industrial Mission (SIM). It seemed a very good idea at the time. After all, SIM, formed on 21 October 1966, had become a sub-committee of the Council of Churches of Malaysia and Singapore in June 1967.

Before long, however, some difficulties were encountered. Some members of Jurong Christian Church found the activities of the community organization workers at the Civic Centre objectionable, as the finer difference in aims between the Civic Centre and the church began to show. The church, as God's representative and instrument, would like to draw all people together as a community of God's children through Jesus Christ. The Civic Centre just wanted to draw people from all sections of the community together so that there would be peace and harmony within the community. Since the ends were different, the means to the ends were different. Non-Christians were employed as workers in the Civic Centre. They were also prepared to organize community-related activities in the church premises without any emphasis on the gospel motive for the activities, which was what the church wanted. Not surprisingly, people using the civic centre had the impression that the church was simply leasing out its facilities to community groups. On 25 August 1970, for example, SIM organized an Indian Cultural concert on the premises, and in November the same year, a Deepavali celebration was held. Church leaders interpreted these as purely entertaining and not evangelistic.

Gradually, relations between the Civic Centre workers and those worshipping in the church became strained. The controversy among church council members over the differences of opinion regarding community organization work became so heated that in November the same year, the Singapore District Cabinet of the LCMS wrote to the LCMS Head Office

asking it to request that SIM leave the Jurong premises. By May 1972, SIM did leave the church.

Our problems were far from over. In April 1972, a controversy between the church council and the English Youth Fellowship over a variety show resulted in the closing down of the Fellowship. The Fellowship's chairman at that time was Peter Teo, a former active community organization worker who had been instrumental in bringing Taekwon-do and other activities into the Civic Centre earlier. On 28 May 1972, another controversy between the English and Chinese sections of the congregation resulted in 5 leading members of the English section walking out of a full congregational meeting. In 1974, things came to a head over an event involving the church council (which still had non-Lutheran members due to the ecumenical nature of the church membership), the pastors and LCMS Executive Council. At that time, one of the recreational programmes was a pugilistic class which some church council members thought was not in harmony with Christian teachings and should not be continued. The church council met and voted to close the class. It seems, however, that the Chinese pastor, Chin Tao Sum, had no objections to the class and wanted it to continue. Word got out to the people running the pugilistic class that certain members of the church council wanted the class stopped. Apparently, some of these council members were threatened by the people running the pugilistic class, and one thing led to another. In October 1973, the LCMS Executive Council dissolved the entire church council and decided that the Jurong church would have to follow the LCMS model constitution. This meant that one must be a Lutheran to be a member of the congregation. It was also decided that no member of the current church council would be eligible for reelection for the next two years. This decision, however, was rescinded just before the reelection. In addition, both pastors were reassigned. Chin was replaced by *Stephan Han*; and Nelson was replaced by *Ralph Kusserow* in 1974. He still remembers us to this day. Let us read his personal testimony and greetings (received by email June 25, 2003) for encouragement:



Ralph Kusserow, pastor from 1974 to 1982

I was born 27 May 1936, in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, USA. I went to primary and secondary school in Pittsburgh. I attended Thiel College, a Lutheran college, in Greenville, Pennsylvania from 1954 to 1958. I graduated with a B.A. degree. I then went to Hamma School of Theology in Springfield, Ohio, receiving my M.Div. in 1961. Following that, I studied for a year in Germany. My first parish was in Tiro, Ohio, USA.

In 1965, I went to Chicago to study at the School of Missions for one year. In 1966 I went to Malaysia. For one year I served at Happy Garden Lutheran Church in Ipoh. Then I studied Cantonese for one year. In 1968 I went to Lenggong and served in the Grik Valley for two years. In 1970-71 I was home for furlough. In 1971 I was assigned again to Happy Garden. In 1974 I was assigned to JCC and served there until 1982. My reason for leaving Singapore was that our church had its first two graduates from Bible School that year, Edmund Lim and Terry Kee. Since the Lutheran Church in Malaysia and Singapore had only one position open in Singapore at that time, I resigned so that both of those young pastors could be employed.

In 1984, I was asked to go to Tanzania as a missionary and served there until 1998. We had to return home at that time because of a health problem. The problem troubles me until today.

I married Carol Corinne Zigler in 1959. Carol had just graduated from Wittenberg University in Springfield, Ohio. Her major was music and her major instrument was piano. We have three children. Hans was born in 1960, Kurt was born in 1963 and Timothy was born in 1964.

My parents were Christians and had me baptized as a baby. So, I am fortunate that I grew up in a Christian home and always knew Jesus as my Saviour. As a youth, I occasionally considered becoming a pastor but did not give it serious thought until one day in 1954 when I had a wonderful experience. I experienced the presence of the Lord and knew that He wanted me to become pastor. I immediately enrolled at Thiel College and pursued my theological studies.

At present I am retired. My wife and I are living in Tucson, Arizona, U.S.A. Our reason for coming here was to help take care of my wife's mother. She is a retired missionary to India, having served there for 41 years! She is now 102 years old and is bedfast.

Carol's sister has been taking care of her for some years and we decided to come here to help take care of her.

We would appreciate very much receiving a copy of the Vine in which you tell something of the history of JCC. Our address is: Rev. and Mrs. Ralph F. Kusserow, 3003 W. Broadway #33, Tucson, AZ 85745-2556.

Please give our greetings to those at JCC who still remember us.

We pray for all of the congregations that I have served in the past and pray that God will continue to guide and bless JCC.

Yours in Christ,
Pastor Kusserow

To be continued ...

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JCC Retreat 2003 – The “HEART” Issues

By Tony Koh



It was a great learning experience for me at the retreat, especially with the 3 Theme Talks by our Guest Speaker Dr. Gary Choong.

It was indeed an honour and privilege to be able to learn practical lessons from the Bible passages in 1 Peter as expounded by Dr Choong, who led us to an in-depth understanding of various contemporary “HEART” issues faced by us. I am unable to reproduce at length and in words so much heard and discussed that held the attention of participants at the retreat. However, I can share some brief snippets:

- ❑ Recognizing the awesome significance of the cost of discipleship and our vertical relationship with God, the HEART issue is about us putting our relationship with God right in the first place. To acknowledge and know God and establish a right relationship with Him is for all – young, teen, middle-aged and the old. Have we seriously put our relationship right with God?
- ❑ The contemporary issues of justice and injustice faced by Christians in the world were dealt with by Dr Choong and there are questions we can ask ourselves about our dealings with others as we try to think about the matter of how others deal with us. We can name the various injustices we face daily as Christians. How do we deal with them squarely? Have we been fair bosses/employers or fair and diligent employees in the world where we have a lot to complain about? Have we exercised our Christian rights and discernment in the face of injustices? Have we experienced a real regenerated forgiveness to those who deeply wrong us?
- ❑ In the society, we are to obey authorities. In the family context, the relationship between husband and wife is one of partnership in Christ. Looking at the alarming divorce rate of both Christians and non-Christians, we know that the institution of marriage is seriously under attack. The Biblical teaching of submission and love ought to be our guiding principle.
- ❑ Leadership is earned through trust. Conviction in service is more important than Credential and Competence. If one is incompetent, training can be provided. If one is without conviction or without the right attitude to service, little help can be given. Moreover, character is formed through toil and suffering, as attested by servants of God in the Bible. Smooth-sailing leadership is not the norm. We are leaders in different ways. Are we prepared for suffering? Or are we just prepared for smooth-sailing experience?

I had the good opportunity together with Wilfred and Nick to interact with Dr. Gary during the Friday afternoon’s Discovering Singapore activity. We had some good sharing on his ministry and work, and on various Christian subjects.

HEART-felt thanks to the Organizing Committee and assistants from SBC for the Children Programs. It was a retreat experience of great benefit to all participants. Hope that all had imbibed the right dose of wisdom for dealing with the HEART issues of our life in our Christian walk of faith. †

A Nice Retreat Experience By Karen Soh

I had always heard about people going away for a retreat. Some, like Peter Cheong's and James Tan's families, always tried to make it a point to attend it every year.

I wondered what the draw was. Being a young Christian, I wanted to experience it myself. However, because of the nature of Alan's work and my lack of confidence to handle Nathaniel alone overseas, we were not able to attend the past retreats.

When this year's retreat was announced, I thought to myself how nice if we could make it. Even my husband was jokingly saying about how nice it would be if his company could announce a 1 – 2 weeks plant shutdown for major renovation during the proposed retreat period so that he would also be able to join the retreat.

Then came SARS and news of the possibility that the retreat might be cancelled. Again we joked, "Well, what if the Retreat Committee does not cancel it but maybe have it in Singapore instead. We will then be able to go."

I think I must be among the first few to sign up when the retreat was confirmed to be held in Singapore.

God heard our jokes. (Indeed, God is always with us.) He burdened Yew Moi's heart (as he had shared at the retreat). The Committee pressed on to organize the retreat in Singapore having only a very short period of time to go about everything.

This retreat was a nice experience for me. It was great being able to put work aside and spend time in a very relaxed and unruhshed manner with God and the small but warm JCC family.

I share the same thoughts with Jason and Sabrina that though our church is not as fast growing as some would like it to be, we still have that extra family touch that helps pull us close together and it is this same spirit that gives JCC its beauty.

I want to thank God for our youths, too. During the retreat, I had opportunities to mingle around with some of the youths and came to realize that they are different

from non-Christian youths in the way they show care and concern, rendering help, and in the respect given to their parents and other elders. It is heartening to see how they express their views with wisdom, maturity and confidence.



Theme Talk 2 made an impact on me. Dr Gary Choong had in very simple words dissected a man's (particularly Asian man's) emotional growth process. With the constant struggle and obsession with worldly success and their achievements up the corporate ladder, the family is often neglected.



I was jolted into realizing how short and fast a person's life can be when you measure them in tens.

I am thankful to God (who prepared me and gave me wisdom) that I was able to share with my boss (I've been praying for her salvation) using the lesson learnt when she shared with me that she is having problems with helping her husband see how much he is neglecting the family in his pursuit for a luxurious living.

Using the same lesson I was also able to help comfort my sister-in-law who was feeling down and unable to cope with my brother-in-law's prolonged absence from Singapore because he, like many others, wants to establish for himself a successful career.



For those of us with children, let us always

remember to spend time and make good effort to teach and nurture them in the way of the Lord for they are blessings bestowed upon us by Him and we are accountable to God for them. "Train a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not turn from it." (Prov. 22:6)

I remembered some older folks telling me – When your kids are young, make sure you enjoy their company because when they grow older, they no longer want your company. They want their friends.

Truly, with such a short lifespan, we should do all that we can to store up our riches in heaven, not the world, and help our future generation to continue to enjoy God's mercies and grace because of their obedience in Christ.

Retreat Reflections by John Lee

Let me begin by quoting what the Chairman of the Retreat Committee, Bro. Yew Moi, wrote:



Chairman, Retreat Committee

“To-date, we have witnessed many events both local and abroad. The Iraq War II, the SARS epidemic and the continuing economic gloom just to name a few. Who knows what will happen next in the coming months.

“All these events affect us in one way or another. But are we letting these events take control of us? Have our Christian faith been shaken? How about our ministries?”

The Chairman’s questions did make me ponder what answers I could personally give. Without a doubt, I have been affected by the events. As parents are put in tight spots financially, they are forced to skimp on spending on children’s tuition on which I depend for my bread and butter. Add to this, with more and more unemployed people joining the tuition market to offer their services, students have more choices – which means that I have to fight harder to safeguard my rice bowl.

But no, I am not letting these events take control of me. My Christian faith has not been shaken. I still continue to struggle as before in my ministries – mainly in the Vine and the JCC Kindergarten Committee.

I employ the word “struggle” because I can think of no better word to describe ministry involvement. I challenge myself with the fact that in the Bible through the Old Testament and New Testament, I cannot find any example of any servant of God doing things fine without struggle, without trials and tribulations. Neither do I see any promise in God’s Word that life is going to be plain sailing. Serving Christ is not for the faint hearted. On this point, the story of Peter’s denial (Lk 22:56-60) should strike a chord in us. Peter’s courage and bravado gave way to fear. For us, how much are we like Peter that when we are challenged by difficult choices, we turn our face from the Lord?

Turning from God’s Word to personal experience in life, in career, in family setting, etc, the reality of ups and downs is deeply imprinted in my consciousness. In moments of highs, I don’t get myself intoxicated with euphoria lest it turns out to be just a dream bubble. Conversely, in moments of lows, I don’t let myself feel downtrodden and drown myself in sorrow because there is always hope in looking up. I trust that it is in your experience too, that things don’t always stay the same. If we can only live when events are one way according to our likes, we will only add to our pain. This world is not a permanent place for me. I am just passing through and so, knowing that my sojourn is a temporary one, some thorn-pricks now and then are more bearable as I take in the smell of the roses.

Although some had commented that the recent JCC retreat (27th & 28th June) would be a bit too short and might be hectic with programmes packed into just two days and one night, it turned out to be quite a pleasant experience. We could pack in three solid Theme Talks and yet have time for “jalan jalan” in the touristy areas outside the confines of the YWCA Retreat premises. I was like a tourist being surprised by many wonderful discoveries. To think that I am a Singaporean being so ignorant of some parks and playgrounds that have been around for years! An example is the Istana Park (opposite the Istana) with its fine-looking water sculpture called the Festival Arch. Bounded by Orchard Road, Penang Road and Buyong Road, it has been standing there for at least six years; yet,



it was the JCC retreat that brought me to admire its beauty for the first time. A nice place for a photo shoot! (See picture)

Walking along, map in hand, the camaraderie of brothers and sisters in Christ took away all sense of tiredness. Little tots were also game for the long stroll. For the children, it was a refreshing time away from books. For the adults, it was cool to take a break from the stress of daily work routines to smell the flowers in the park and feel the warmth of fellowship within the small JCC family. After the exciting Discovering Singapore sightseeing, some retreat participants still had energy to spare for a dip in the YWCA's swimming pool.



It was good planning (THANKS to the organizing committee) that made possible a full and enriching programme in two days and a night. The committee deserves a greater applause because their superb work was carried out with a short time for planning and organizing after months of earlier efforts to set up a retreat in Malaysia had to be jettisoned because of SARS. Thankfully, as it came about, SARS let us discover a wonderful opportunity for an invigorating break right here in Singapore. The sayings "Every cloud has a silver lining" and "Where there is a will, there is a way" were proven valid. If the committee did not have the tenacity to press on after the SARS upset or the almost 100



participants had not had the vim and vigour to sign up for the retreat, you would not be reading this and the testimonies of satisfaction from Bro. Tony Koh and Sis. Karen Soh in this issue of the Vine. Because of SARS, the retreat committee could



have wrung their hands in despair and stopped work. Thank God they didn't. In similar vein, as one gloomy event after another confronts us, we can raise the white flag of surrender and sink into despair, doing nothing. The chairman of the retreat committee might be sparing with words, but his short and sharp questions packed a punch for whoever would sit still and reflect,

"All these events affect us in one way or another. But are we letting these events take control of us? Have our Christian faith been shaken? How about our ministries?"

Invigorated by the retreat from the toils of my daily routines, I can say that the retreat was a real blessing. And I count it as one of many as the following sweet melody encourages me to count:

*When upon life's billows you are tempest-tossed,
When you are discouraged, thinking all is lost,
Count your many blessings, name them one by one,
And it will surprise you what the Lord hath done.*

"When we acknowledge God's great mercies, we are able to offer Him praise – even in pain. Praise comes naturally when you count your blessings." (Our Daily Bread, 10th Feb 1997)

"Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ." (Eph. 1:3)

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Lam's Latest

Dear precious partners,

How time flies and the first half of 2003 is over. Many blessings and trials come and go in our lives. We are reminded that in each trial and blessing, there are some lessons that God wants us to learn.

At the beginning of 2003 we had a change of leadership in our ministry here in Malaysia. At the same time our organization is also heading for a change of leadership as the founder steps down this August. George will still be with OM but more with ministry while Peter who has been his associate for many years will continue with the overall administration.

Jenny's mum has adjusted well and goes on with her life. Currently, she still helps in baby-sitting for Jenny's brother's kids. Jenny's brother is now working in another town and his family will be joining him soon. We will have to be responsible for Jenny's mum when they move out; we will move in with her while they are away for a few years

Jenny is busy helping the kids with their schools' work. It is a challenge for us to guide them, esp. as Jeswyn has opted to study in a Chinese school; we are both illiterates in Chinese! Jenny still does the OM account and occasionally gets involved with ministry and at the some time is available to be with her mum; this does not give her much time left at the end of the day.

From Jedidah: Apa khabar? Now I'm in Primary 3. I'm in the afternoon session and I enjoy going to school with my friends. I have made some good friends and one of them came with her brother to the Kids' Club at church recently. Since the last news I have grown a little taller and can be independent. My hobbies are cooking, reading and playing computer.

This year Jerry still travels a bit. He went to Sitiawan to help in the "Out of the Comfort Zone" camp in Feb, after which he visited his sister in Penang and also Taiping to settle his late parents' land issue with the Land & Survey Dept. It was a trying time because the issue was very complicated,

But you *are* a chosen generation a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light

1Peter 2:9

but praise the Lord for guidance and grace to work it out. *Pray* with us that the lawyer will get it sorted out as soon as possible.

Since the end of last year we had a team working with the local churches in evangelism and discipleship in the rural areas. They have seen good responses but our ultimate goal is to see the folks coming into maturity and being able to lead their own people. Our co-workers are responsible for the running of the team but Jerry usually makes a monthly trip there to keep in touch with the team.

In the past months we also had a few co-workers coming our way to share with the body here. *Pray* with us for excitement to be generated into action. *Pray* also for those we are linking up after their initial inquiries. In July we had a staff retreat in West Malaysia over a weekend. In August Jerry will be attending the OM general council meeting in UK where George Verwer will hand over the leadership to Peter Maiden. His plan to have one or two people from here to join him for an exposure trip to Algeria will probably be postponed to next year.

Hi, It's me again Jeswyn. “*Ni Hao*”

你好

I am in primary 1 in a Chinese school. I go to school from 7.30am to 1 pm (Mon-Fri)

Each day I have some homework, which keep me busy.

The two world events, war in Iraq and SARS remind us that life is so short and many people are fearful of death. Here the fear of SARS was greater than the Iraqi war. There was a recent rumor of drinking green beans soup to prevent SARS that cause the price of green beans to shoot up as high as RM50/kg! Fear had gripped so many into gullibility, unfortunately believers included. How we need to stand on the Word of God and not on the words of men, (or women!) which passes away.

Our hope is on the Lord and we press on towards the goal set before us. Value all of you who stand with us all these years. May He continue to bless you and use you to be a blessing to others.

Thankful for your partnership,

Jerry, Jenny, JD & Jeswyn



Gospel Mission To The Blind Ltd

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Dear Brother & Sister in Christ

Thank you very much for your gift of \$ 167/-to GMB. Your financial support in such tough times is a great help.

Rejoice with us over one lost sheep who came back to GMB, and to the Lord. In 1994 we were ministering to an eight-year-old boy who was very open to the Gospel. But he turned away from us because he chose to obey his grandmother who made him promised her that he would never become a Christian. One of our friends continued to pay his school fees even though he would not come to our Bible classes. Early this year we heard that he was contemplating becoming a Muslim. We prayed for him, and was surprised that he agreed to come back to GMB when his resource teacher suggested that he come to GMB to find out more about the Christian faith since he has so many questions. He prayed to receive salvation last month. Please pray for his spiritual growth, and also for his health. His name is Seet Yong Chye, and is only a teenager, but is suffering from serious diabetes and high blood pressure.

Siew King Hon, an elderly man, also prayed to receive the Lord Jesus as his saviour last month. He will be baptized on 25th of this month. We are doing follow up with two other blind men, Chong Yoke Sin and Go Teck Yong. Pray that they will also choose to be baptized this month. Yoke Sin has prayed to receive the Lord during our Christmas outreach last year; but Teck Yong is still sceptical even though he comes to fellowship meetings regularly.

Please pray for our Chinese camp which will be on 25th through 27th August. Pray for Pastor James Lim and Pastor Clement Chia that the Lord's anointing will be upon them to speak and minister at our camp.

Thank you for your partnership in the Lord's service.

George Lee

George Lee
on behalf of GMB
14 July 2003

Pray that the Holy Spirit will open their spiritual eyes to behold Jesus.

WHAT ARE SIGNS OF THE END?

Matthew 24 begins with Jesus' disciples showing Him the buildings of the temple. Jesus responds, *"Do you not see all these things? Assuredly, I say to you, not one stone shall be left here upon another, that shall not be thrown down."* (NKJV) Jesus was prophesying the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem. The temple would be destroyed because it had served its purpose under the Law of Moses and its sacrifices were being replaced with that of Jesus. They would later crucify the Son of God, and this would be God's judgment upon that sinful nation. (Consider Luke 23:26-31 and Matthew 27:25.)

Upon hearing that the temple would be brought down, Jesus' disciples ask three questions:

- (1) *"Tell us, when will these things be?"*
- (2) *"And what will be the sign of your coming?"*
- (3) *"and of the end of the age?"*

Notice they assume that the destruction of the temple would coincide with the end of all things. They were wrong. However, Jesus answers their questions in the order they asked them.

(1) When will these things (the destruction of the temple) be?

Jesus gives them signs by which they would know that the end of the temple was near. (Matthew 24:4-14.) Upon seeing those signs, they were instructed to flee from the city of Jerusalem. (Matthew 24:15-20.)

(2) What will be the sign of your coming?

In verses 21-31, Jesus speaks of coming in judgment against the nation of Jews at Jerusalem; He is not yet talking about His "second coming." Remember that the Lord brought judgment against sinful nations many times in the Old Testament. The terminology used in verses 29-31 is no different than God used in the Old Testament concerning the fall of Northern Israel (Amos 8:2,9-10), Egypt (Isaiah 19:1; Ezekiel 32:2,7-10), Babylon (Isaiah 13:1,9-13), and even the end of the Mosaic covenant (Acts 2:16-21; Joel 3:15-16; Haggai 2:6-7; Hebrews 12:25-28). This prophetic language indicates Jesus would have an active influence from Heaven in the fall of these things.

When it came to the destruction of Jerusalem's temple, *there would be signs.* Notice in verse 33: *"So you also, when you see all these things, know that it is near, at the very doors."* (NKJV) Jesus also said in the following verse, *"Assuredly, I say to you, this generation will by no heaven pass away till all these things are fulfilled."* (NKJV)

All the events described so far in this chapter would be fulfilled in *that* generation -- the generation in which the apostles lived. Jesus' instructions were to *these* people to flee Jerusalem when *they* saw the signs. Indeed, Jerusalem and the temple were destroyed completely at A.D. 70 by the Roman army with the help of the Lord.

(3) And of the end of the age?

In verse 35, Jesus says, "*Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will by no means pass away.*" (NKJV) He is emphasizing the fact that His words will outlast all things---that His word is sure. But here, Jesus changes the subject from the destruction of Jerusalem to answer His disciples' last question.

Verse 36 begins, "*But of that day....*" Which day? The day Heaven and earth will pass away. Now He *is* talking about the end of the world. "*But of that day and hour no one knows, no, not even the angels of heaven, but My Father only.*" (NKJV) Concerning the destruction of Jerusalem, its time could be determined by signs. But the time of the ultimate end will not be preceded by such signs of warning.

People will be going about their business as they did just prior to the flood in Noah's day (verses 37-39). No one will suspect the day on which Jesus comes again. People will be separated from one another quickly at the end (verses 40-41). Some will be taken away for condemnation (2Thessalonians 1:7-9; Matthew 13:40-43), the righteous will be left in the caring hands of God.

The fact is: there is no way we can know when the world will end. It will be a time that those alive will not expect (Matthew 24:42-44). All the parables that follow into chapter 25 speak about preparing for Christ to come again in person -- this time to judge. *There will be no signs* because Jesus will come as unexpectedly as "a thief in the night." (2 Peter 3:10.)

What we do know about the condition of earth at the final end?

What will the world be like before the end? All we know is: there will be sinners (Matthew 24:38-39) and scoffers (2 Peter 3:3ff) and saints (1 Thessalonians 4:15-17), just as there are now. At what point will God the Father decide to end all things? We do not know. Even Jesus does not know the hour in which the Father will send Him and the angels to gather the righteous and unrighteous.

With these things in mind, let's not look for signs, because none will be given. Let's consider instead a sign that has already been given -- the sign of Jesus resurrection. Jesus is alive, and He is Lord and Christ. He will be your judge one day. Are you ready to meet Him?

My Nias Island Experience

By Nick Wong

My trip to Nias Island in Indonesia was actually my first trip as a Christian. I flew to Medan from Changi Airport on May 27 on SilkAir with three others from The Church of Our Redeemer, some of whom had been there 2 to 3 times with Pastor Michael and family.



Wow! There was over 300 kg of baggage (excluding personal luggage) to be brought to the orphanage and, happily, SilkAir let us through without charging extra fees. (Thank God for helping one of the members go through various channels for the free excess baggage allowance).

In Medan, we stayed at one of the elders' house for a night and returned to the airport in the morning for the domestic flight to the island, but the flight was postponed another day because a political party had booked the entire plane to island. So the baggage travelled by lorry and then ferry to the island with Pastor Michael's sister-in-law & maid. The journey took about 4-5hours on land & 8-10 hours on ferry).



In Nias, Christians are in the majority. We were received by Pastor Michael, Pak Laia (orphanage head) and the children and stayed at the biggest of the 3 orphanages.

Residents at the orphanages were from 1-22 years old. Some had lost their parents, some were abandoned children and others were taken in because their parents cannot afford to support them. The orphanages provide them with food,



accommodation and schooling.

I also visited the new orphanage building, which can hold 100-150+ children. Funds for the building were raised by Pastor Michael and members of his mission - *Tomorrow's Hope*.



In the orphanage, we had some spiritual sharing with the children and their social workers and I was amazed to hear them sing so beautifully, hymns in the Indonesian language. We also taught them dressmaking, cooking, basic computer skills and concepts of life so that they would be equipped for life when they leave the orphanage.



We had a day outing at the beach a few kilometres



away and the children readily enjoyed it because it was a chance for recreation that they would not normally have. I was glad to note the ability of the elder ones to care for the younger ones. There were not many foreigners on the island except those doing mission work; and some Australians and Europeans surfing in the open Indian Ocean.

In Nias, one can have a *bay-chap* (tricycle in Bahasa Indonesia) ride for 30 cents per trip for 1-2 persons depending on weight. We preferred to ride one to a *bay-chap* because of our size. (Niasans are mostly small-built.) Shopping at their “Orchard Road” was a great bargaining experience. In contrast, things were quite expensive in the island’s main town.

Although this was my first trip to Nias, I hope to be there again. Sharing lessons with the orphans was an opportunity for me to be a blessing as I have been blessed spiritually by my care-group and JCC members. It also afforded me a further opportunity for self-learning of God’s Word.



May God bless *Tomorrow’s Hope* for a job well done among the orphans.



A QUESTION THAT SEEKS AN ANSWER

What is the difference between fate that non-Christians talk about and predestination that Christians believe in? (Question posed at a CG meeting)



Do not be confused by the variety of shades that people with different interests paint the words in. Non-Christians who talk about fate, and then put it to Christians that we believe in it too, do not really understand the biblical predestination (or Providence) that we uphold. Similarly, if we do not grasp the perspective of fate that our non-Christian friends hold, we may become unwittingly led into thinking that predestination is just a fanciful term we use for the same thing as fate.

“The concept of Providence is rooted in the belief in the existence of a benevolent, wise, and powerful deity. Benevolence is the primary requirement. If the starting point of a just and divine being is completely lost sight of or if it is consciously denied, then Providence becomes fate.” – This explanation by *Britannica Encyclopaedia* clearly distinguishes fate from predestination. In essence, fate is not ascribed to any divine power. It carries the notion that we have no freedom of choice, are helpless, subject to a cosmic determinism that is unjust, illogical and intimidating. When people advise “not to tempt fate,” they are actually acknowledging the uncertainty of fate. When they say, “Oh ... it is all fated,” the idea of inescapability and gloom permeates the air. The sighing is invariably related to something ominous or something tragic that has already happened.

Predestination, on the other hand, is ascribed to a divine benevolent Being who is in control. As Christians, we recognize a loving God who cares for us. We believe in God’s secret wisdom in all that he destined for our glory before time began. (*1 Cor. 2:7*) Whatever that is predestined has a purpose, even in our trials. So, knowing this truth, we do not feel unsettled because we know quite well that we were destined for them. (*1 Thess. 3:3*) Instead, we recognize the link between Providence and our free will to submit to divine guidance by “the faith of God’s elect and the knowledge of the truth that leads to godliness – a faith and knowledge resting on the hope of eternal life, which God, who does not lie, promised before the beginning of time ...” (*Titus 1:1-2*) As we sail through our trials and tribulations, we will see the perfect unfolding of God’s will and note that in Christ we were chosen “having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will, in order that we, who were the first to hope in Christ, might be for the praise of his glory.” (*Eph 1:11-12*)

Call it a mystery if you wish, but I perceive that predestination, free will and hope are three attributes embodied in the whole supernatural plan of a benevolent God. We do not hear Christians say “I leave everything to Providence” because Christians know that they have an active role to play to attain their hope and destiny. In contrast, non-Christians who claim to leave everything to fate submit themselves to passivity and give up their go-getting. In the extreme, they may even despair and give up living a full and meaningful life. How sad! If only they can be freed from the insecurity of fate and gain the reassurance in “our Lord Jesus Christ himself and God our Father, who loved us and by his grace gave us eternal encouragement and good hope.” (*2 Thess. 2:16*)

John Lee



A remarkable thing about the 36th Anniversary celebration is the crowd. There were people everywhere until the sanctuary was packed to overflowing.



Sometimes we think of ourselves as JCC and the Chinese section as some other church. However, as members of both language sections of the congregation share the celebratory mood, we know that regardless of our language, we are working together as one body of Christ in Jurong, with the common mission to reach out to the lost and fill the church to capacity.



It was also worth rejoicing that after the anniversary service, the entire assembly went down to the MPH to have the Bishop officially dedicate it.

Then came the food. I was pleasantly surprised that there was sufficient for all, with leftovers still.

To God be the glory for all the great things He has done.

