

# The Vine

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## Editor's Views

*Now the body is not made up of one part but of many. If the foot should say, "Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body," it would not for that reason cease to be part of the body. And if the ear should say, "Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body," it would not for that reason cease to be part of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would the sense of hearing be? If the whole body were an ear, where would the sense of smell be? But in fact God has arranged the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be. If they were all one part, where would the body be? As it is, there are many parts, but one body.* **1Corinthians 12:14-20**

We are all very familiar with the body analogy of the church. However, like most people, we expect the church to be made up of all the same part. Everyone a super evangelist like Paul or everyone a devoted listener like Mary. Then where is there room for a Luke or a Martha, the people who write the books or do the ordinary household work?

Even as I look at the composition of my Cell Group, if everyone were an Alan Soh then we would always be going on outings and have very little book study. On the other hand, if everyone were a John Lee, then we would probably spend all our time reading and hardly have any outings. However by God's grace the group is balanced by these two complementary members.

If I extend the body analogy to the church, then we can see that although we are all different in nature, habit and Christian maturity, we trust that God has arranged all of us just as He wanted it to be. What we need to do is to find the right balance instead of trying to make everyone fit into a single mould.

If you read comic books like the X-Men or the Fantastic Four or other superhero teams, you will realize that the writers of these titles actually made all their superhero creations with strengths and weaknesses. Only when they fight as a team can they win; but individually, they always lose the battle.

So too with us, if we decide to go it alone we may be leaving our weak side exposed to the devil's attack. If we work as a team, as a body, we would be much stronger. 1Corinthians 12:21 says, "*The eye cannot say to the hand, 'I don't need you!'*"

So it is with heavy heart I make this last appeal for you to join the church retreat. Can the whole body go and leave behind a hand, or an eye or a leg? Although 100% may be an impossible dream but at least I hope we do not leave behind too many body parts, especially if it is the weaker ones.

God will make a way. Read Bro John Lee's testimony.

*Martin Cheah*



# Transformed By God's Grace

*Part II (Next Month): Life – Take it seriously for P.E.A.*

Apostle Paul, before his conversion, was an enemy and persecutor of the Church. In comparison, I, before my conversion, wasn't as bad. Nevertheless, though considering myself to be a free thinker, I did not feel satisfied to keep my peace and let the Christians just go about their own business. I was active in arguing with Christians and making them flummoxed by my philosophical bent. So while I did not physically persecute anybody as Paul did, I was in a way mentally persecuting Christians by my verbal attacks.

When I was with the Catholic school, St. Joseph's Institution, I had opportunities of being spoken to about Christ. It was not an unwelcome attention, because I took pleasure to stump my Christian schoolmates until they became wordless to deal with my anti-Christian quizzes.

Those who know me know my loud voice. When serving national service, I had frequent occasions to make heads turn when I exchanged words with a comrade about Christianity at the back of a bus. My negative sentiment usually was quite a put off to those Christians who, out of kind intention, sought to share with me the Good News. Invariably, they would give up on me.

So it happened at a workplace cell group to which I was invited by a stranger (a sweet young lady) from another department. It was an invitation that popped out only at an incidental meeting. I accepted the invitation because I wanted

to know more about Christianity – NOT SO THAT I MIGHT GAIN FROM IT, BUT THAT I MIGHT COLLECT MORE AMMUNITION TO LAUNCH ATTACKS. I was more of a disruption at the regular cell meetings than a beneficiary. After a number of cell meetings, this lady who invited me suggested to her friends that I ought to be driven out.

While I was making myself infamous for my anti-Christian vociferousness, I took up an evening Philosophy leisure course at the former University of Singapore. The course made me more and more perplexed by the many questions about life and about the universe that I could find no answer. The great reasoning of philosophers did not satisfy.

Surprisingly, one day, a colleague whom I was not on cordial terms told me about a Mandarin rally at the former National Theatre. He asked me to go, but did not make arrangement to accompany or meet me there. Finally, I did go alone. Another surprise: despite the crowd, free seating and no prior arrangement, I ended sitting next to the colleague at the Theatre.

At the rally, I was moved by the message and realized that answers to many questions could only come from God, not from philosophers. Tears flowed freely as I accepted Christ as my Lord and Saviour.

Recently, at the Singapore Expo Hall, I chanced upon a few philosophical quotations high on the walls just outside

the Body Worlds exhibition area. Here they are:

“Death is the release from all pain and complete cessation, beyond which our suffering will not extend. It will return us to that condition of tranquility, which we had enjoyed before we were born. Should anyone mourn the deceased, then he must also mourn the unborn. Death is neither good nor evil, for good or evil can only be something that actually exists. However, whatever is of itself nothing and which transforms everything else into nothing will not at all be able to put us at the mercy of Fate.” – *Seneca*

“Get used to the idea that Death should not matter to us, for good and evil are based on sensation. Death, however, is the cessation of all sensation. Hence, Death, ostensibly the most terrifying of all evils, has no meaning for us, for as long as we exist, Death will not be present. When Death comes, then we will no longer be in existence.” – *Epicurus*

Philosophical proclamations like those above were the stuff that tickled my mind in my pre-Christian days, and the stuff that I would toss around to satisfy myself that all the tales about God, about life after death, etc. were just that – tales and nothing more. Now, having embraced God, the real Truth has dawned upon me and sunk into the depth of my consciousness by the Almighty’s grace and the working of His Holy Spirit. **In the next issue of *The Vine*, I will share on the subject of taking life seriously for personal eternal assurance. You**

**will know why I am not impressed by the philosophical statements of Seneca and Epicurus.**

In 1978, about six months before the Billy Graham Crusade, I accepted Christ. At the Billy Graham Crusade, I served God as an usher. As I shared in *Vine*, I was baptized about one week later on 17<sup>th</sup> Dec that year. After my conversion, I was as vociferous by mouth and prolific in writing as ever. This time, however, I had become a defender of the faith. I continued my presence at the workplace cell group with that sweet young lady who first invited me before my conversion and later wanted to drive me out. Thank God that she succeeded in her effort of inviting me to the cell but failed in her subsequent effort to expel me. Since she could not drive me out, God had a better plan for her – i.e., to learn to live with me by her side for life. Her name is Peggy. She is my beloved wife.

Up to this day, I am a defender of the faith. With my past experience in actively rejecting Christ, I know that unless God intervenes, it is an uphill task to try winning any soul for Christ. I know I was converted with prayers behind the efforts of men. Just like Apostle Paul, God’s intervention played a most significant part in any conversion.

Amazing grace! How sweet the sound  
That saved a wretch like me!  
I once was lost, but now am found;  
Was blind, but now I see.

The above is my favourite hymn, which I sang at my baptism. All glory be to God, great things He hath done!

*John Lee*

## **10 LESSONS TO IMPART TO CHILDREN BY A FATHER**

In the course of your Christian living, I am certain, my brothers, you have asked and prayed for many blessings to be bestowed upon you. I am sure one such request is to have children, either sons or daughters. Indeed God has granted you your wishes and blessed you with many offsprings. But with blessings come responsibilities. Fatherhood has heavy responsibilities. Scriptures have illustrated that fatherhood not at par with God's standard has dreadful consequences. Their failure as fathers had caused tragedies upon tragedies to the third and fourth generations. The series of Jewish kings during the Southern Kingdom is an example of poor fatherhood. Fathers lead the family and families form a community. Groups of communities will form a nation. Therefore, failure of fatherhood will impact the communities and eventually the nation. Likewise it is also true that successful fatherhood will sustain the community and in turn the nation.

After King Solomon, generation after generation, each king was unable to eliminate the idolatrous practices in the kingdom. Yet God had specifically instructed His people not to worship idols and the ways of the former occupants of the Promised Land. These kings ruled the nation and the citizens followed the lead. Hence, generations after generations, the Jews suffered because of their sins and finally, lost their inheritance that God gave them. They became a race with no land.

What is your concept of fatherhood? Is your definition of fatherhood similar to what is listed below?

- Earn sufficient income to feed the family
- To be a friend to your children
- Listen to your children
- Provide the best and highest education available to your children in order to have a headstart in life
- Expose your children to arts, music and sports to develop your children to be a more "rounded" person.

The above are noble intentions. But at best, they are only trivial. God has more important things for fathers to teach their children. The primary duty of a father is to teach holy living to his children. In the process, teach them wisdom in God's perspective. In the book of Proverbs, God has laid down ten lessons which fathers need to impart to their children. These are the lessons God values more than our definitions and concepts.

### **1. Teach your children to fear the Lord**

Fathers, first and foremost, teach your children to fear the Lord. Proverbs 1:7 states that "the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom." Everything starts by fearing God. What does the word "fear" mean? It has two aspects – positive and negative. Being positive is to have a reverential respect and awe towards God's holiness, love,

grace and mercy etc. Negative being the fear of God's wrath and His right to punish us. Fathers, you must teach your children who God is. Impart to them the attributes of God. Teach them that God is loving, powerful, holy, omniscient, faithful, kind, consistent, merciful and other God's characteristics. On the other hand, impress on them to fear God's displeasure. His right to punish, chasten and judge. Therefore, teach your children to worship God with the knowledge of all the characteristics of God. Having said that, fathers, are you an example for your children to follow in worshipping God? Does your life demonstrate a worshipping heart towards God? Are you consistent and faithful in attending worship services on the Lord's Day? Can your children see in you a true worshipper? Because whatever patterns you establish for yourself, your children will follow your legacy.

## 2. **Teach your children to guard their mind**

We are living in the "Information Age". Everyday, a huge amount of information is generated. This information is disseminated via books, magazines, television and radio programmes, newspapers and advertisements etc. Information technologies have given rise to Internet and e-mail. Gadgets that are more technologically advanced and user-friendly will be made available in the near future. With all these advances, we are exposed to a large amount of information of all sorts with just some clicks on the computer mouse. Our children are attracted to explore the cyberspace. Satan knows how to prey on mankind. He will pollute man's mind with falsehood, exploit man's lust and plot schemes to lure man into sin. Satan and his demons will strike at every opportunity to snatch us from God's hand. Satan sure knows where to strike – man's mind. Because through the mind, comes man's response. The mouth, hands and limbs follow the mind's instruction. When our mind is ensnared with Satan's deception, we tend to sin.

Therefore, fathers, you have a formidable task in guarding your children's mind. Proverbs 4:23 instructs us to guard our hearts because it is the wellspring of life. Jesus in Matthew 15 said it is not that which goes into the mouth that makes us unclean but that which comes out from us. Fathers, you have the task to ensure your children's mind is programmed with truth, virtue, integrity, love, faithfulness and so on. Fathers, you are the guardian of your children's mind. This is your duty before God. Hence, you should emphasize on good Christian education, exposure to the Word of God, application of God's commandments and at the same time, guard your children's mind from undesirable information and values.

*(Much of the text has been adapted from John MacArthur's message entitled "Crucial Lessons for a Wise Father" and my reading of the Book of Proverbs)*

*by Chong Yew Moi – March 2004*

***To be continued...***

# Lutheran Community Care Services Ltd



The LCCS had its first Annual General Meeting on 2<sup>nd</sup> March 2004.

We all know that the LCCS is a ministry associated with the Lutheran Church, and it was a first experience for us to have an AGM conducted company-style. (The LCCS is registered as a Company and as a Charity, and is a full member of the NCSS.)

Incorporated on 2<sup>nd</sup> September 2002, it is only a little over a year old. Yet, a few meaningful milestones have been crossed.

## Partnership with Kainos Consultancy

Year 2003 began with LCCS conducting its first course to prepare volunteers to work as youth coaches in schools. Work was started in North View Secondary School and Shuqun Secondary School in partnership with Kainos Consultancy. It was as much an optimistic service to the community as it was a positive learning experience for the volunteers and the LCCS. By the time the work was brought to a close as Kainos Consultancy decided to discontinue the partnership, LCCS had already conducted group work training for 120 students in North View and assisted in conducting training for one class in Shuqun.

## CAST (Cooperative Adolescents Study Team)

The SARS outbreak, instead of dampening spirits, provided some time off for the LCCS to do research and develop its school programme. By July, the CAST was set in motion at Marsiling and Woodlands Secondary Schools. After speaking to the Principals in a school cluster, six schools expressed interest to work with the LCCS. Unfortunately, the constraints of resources limited the LCCS ability to work with all the schools.

The CAST programme is continually undergoing refinement. It affords flexibility for the schools to adapt it according to their needs to positively impact the lives of the students. This year, the schools that have their training schedules firmly in place are: Assumption English School, Greenridge Secondary, Jurong Secondary and Marsiling Secondary. LCCS is privileged to have a team of professional trainers helping out on a pro-bono basis and a group of committed volunteer Youth Coaches working with the students.

# Seven Seasons of a Person

*Patrick Morley (author of Man in the Mirror)*

*(Notes for first part of 4- part study for Bethel Care Group)*

*For effective application, it would be useful if a small group can gather and share each other response to the questions at the end of each season)*

## **What is this?**

At any one time, we each go through different stages or seasons in life. Sometimes unexpectedly, sometimes it is a barely perceptible transition to a new season, and often we are in more than one season at one time.

Patrick Morley describes this as a life plan; namely, season of Reflection, Building, Crisis, Renewal, Rebuilding, Suffering and Success. This life plan is NOT a list of activities to gain God's favor, but a response to the Grace of God in your life.

In this study, you will be asked a number of decisions, which have the potential to change your life, your priority and life's direction. It is good that everyone decides in advance how much he/she is willing to be changed.

## **Season of Reflection**

This is similar to the concept of "to wander and to wonder" as Swee Leong described it, found in JCC Spirituality Handbook. This can also be realized during our personal retreat as expounded by Pastor Anthony. Most of us are "on-the-run", the moment we open our eyes in the morning until bedtime. And for some, even sleep is of no relief as dreams can be of work. We are under pressure, made no mistake on this. In our on-line culture, we don't have much, or make, time to stop and really take stock. We are buried under mountains of work, demands and expectations. Sometimes, we are even not sure of the importance of what we are doing. The question is, can we pause long enough for any serious self-examination and reflection?

Not only are we busy, we are often deceived. Demosthene said, *"Nothing is easier than self-deceit; for what each man wishes, that he also believes to be true."*

Or Martin Luther said, *"we love nothing more ardently than our own feeling, judgment, purpose, and will, especially when they seem to be good."*

Are we chasing after the winds? Meaningless, totally meaningless.

We can never be able to have an accurate picture of ourselves on our own. For that, we must experience God's truth. The goal of reflection is to see ourselves as God sees us.

## Discussion Questions.

1. Write down and rank five people or activities that occupy most of your time. On another list, write and rank five people or activities that you consider most important in your life. (Complete this before going to the next question)

*Question- Are you spending your time on who and what is most important in your life?*

2. Why is it difficult for you to pause and reflect?

## **Season of Building**

When we are young, we build up our education and physical endowment. After graduation, we build our career and later our family. We build our future (esp. monies, properties) and build the kind of life we hope to enjoy. This is the season of building. But what is the foundation? Is it sand or rock? Can it stand up against the wind and rain that comes our way?

As in any building, the structure is only as strong as the foundation.

### Building our marriage

After the wedding bells/dinner/honeymoon, couples seem to drift apart. Are you? How to build a strong marriage foundation?

- a. Invest in Emotional Bank Account. Every interaction is either a deposit or withdrawal. Any banker will tell you to deposit more than withdrawal if you do not want to bankrupt your account. Encourage your spouse with words, touch, time together (alone if possible), pray together and study God's words.
- b. Speak Love Languages. Often, we love our wives the way we want to be loved, and our wives love us the way they want to be loved. But what is the way our spouse wants to be loved? Discover the love language of your spouse. Don't use Chinese if she can only understand English.
- c. Listen, Understand, then Respond. One lady was heard talking to another lady, "your husband is a good communicator". The other responded immediately, "How could that be, he doesn't talk and he doesn't listen". Is this you? Tell a husband any issue/problem, and immediately, he will give a quick advice and solution. But a wife DOES NOT NEED ADVICE or SOLUTION. She needs her husband's time to listen and hear her heart.

### Building Our Children

Children are gifts from God and we are simply the stewards. And, we are to help them develop a heart of love for God and others. Question is, How?



- a. Christian Worldview. A very difficult task for any parent, especially when there are many more sources of information and influence than we as parents may not even be aware of or are able to or want to censor. Use any news/events in the newspaper to present and explain the Christian's perception; especially, your own decisions and choices. The best time would be when the family gather for meals (importance of having family meal together)
- b. Family Mission. Today's children often have the idea that the world revolves around them. They can be self-centred and have tremendous freedom and little responsibilities. Adopt a Family Mission, reach out to neighbors, classmates, missionary family, community services or be active in church ministry.

### Building a Lifestyle

What is the problem with money? All benefits of money are temporal, while all risks are eternal. Dust we are made of, and dust we will be when "the time is up". For many, materialism is like an addiction. At our funeral, nobody remembers the monies that you have amassed, but rather, the people will treasure the relationship that we have cultivated and shared. Jesus said, "Seek ye first his Kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well".

### Questions

1. What is your love language? And what do you think is your spouse's love language?
2. What is your bank account?
3. How to bring a Christian view of the world's events/values to your children?

### **Season of Crisis & Renewal**

*(After rain, there is sunshine. These 2 seasons are discussed simultaneously)*

Why me? What have I done to deserve this? Everyone will experience crisis, some small and some big or worse, several crises simultaneously. Sometimes, they are our own making - results of a long series of poor decisions. Other times, they are unexpected and through no fault of our own. In Australia, in every summer there are bush fires which reduce vast forests into black charcoal stumps and soils. Yet, in autumn, new shoots will sprout and soon the stumps will be covered with green leaves and the soil will have tall grasses. So how do we survive a crisis and turn it into a season of renewal? Or do we allow the crisis to burn us out?

### Values –What’s Important

Do we buy values of our culture or values of God? Careerism, individualism, consumerism, materialism and relativism top today’s list. If we are not careful, we can end up with a bad case of the “-isms”!

### Expectations: What’s due

All disappointment is the result of unmet expectations. Our culture dictates a certain expectations about what it takes to be happy. How many “Cs” to be happy? Are we grateful for the countless blessings? Or remain unhappy at the unmet expectations?

### Purpose-What’s the Point

The problem is not that we are not achieving our goals, but that they’re just the wrong goals. We are all climbing up the ladder except that it’s leaning on the wrong wall.

### Unresolved Issues – Especially Relationships

We are so busy that it seems easier to hope that people’s problems will just go away. Time will solve the problem. Really? Most men have unresolved issues in the area of relationships – with father, brother, spouse, children, friends, associates and bosses. Left unchecked, this will lead to crisis.

### **Renewal - Turning Back to God.**

The start of Renewal is Repentance, turning back to God. The first of Martin Luther’s 95 thesis was, “*When our lord and master Jesus Christ called men to “repent”, he meant that the whole of the Christian life should be one of repentance*”. What is involved in repentance?

- a. Recognition of sin
- b. Sorrow for sin
- c. See sin as it really is – turning our backs on our loving Father.
- d. Faith in God’s mercy

### Discussion Questions

- a. Ever enter burnout or deep sorrow? How did you emerge? If you have not entered a season of crisis, what factors do you think spare you from such?
- b. Have you ever experienced genuine repentance? How was your life changed?

SHINE (Support, Help, Integrate, Nurture, Enable)

The Family Court initiated Project SHINE to work with community agencies to minister to needy mothers whose husbands defaulted on family maintenance. LCCS is recognized as one of the justice constituents working with the courts through the network of Lutheran congregations, including Jurong Christian Church.

Member Churches and Volunteers

The work of the LCCS is not possible without the strong support of the Lutheran congregations. These congregations have been giving faithfully to the social cause of the church mandate financially and encouraging volunteers to render their time and expertise in the spirit of Christian love.

Social Enterprise and Fund Raising

The buzzword in the social service industry is social enterprise. Increasingly, more and more social agencies are finding it more challenging to raise funds. NCCS is proactive in encouraging VWOs to embark on setting up social enterprise – i.e., the setting up of a business with a social mission. The directors of LCCS are presently studying the matter.

In conjunction with the LCS Family Day, scheduled for 10<sup>th</sup> July, there will be a fund raising effort to support the LCCS.

May members of the Lutheran Family always be warm-hearted in supporting the social mission of the Church by offering their cash and talents as working capital for the LCCS to continue its good work. May they all be blessed to be a blessing!

†

A Little Testimony  
of  
God's Enabling When He Was Needed

~~~~~  
*John Lee*

At peak periods, it is always near impossible to hail a taxi. It was the evening peak (6.30 p.m.) at Choa Chu Kang when I was in a rush to get to The Church of Our Redeemer at Bukit Timah to attend the 1<sup>st</sup> AGM of LCCS. I could have taken bus service 67 direct to Bukit Timah, but since the time was short and it was peak period, I was afraid that the bus making stops every now and then and travelling along congested roads would cause me to be very late for my appointment. So I decided to take a cab.

Just as I walked out to the road, a vacant taxi drove into sight instantly at the opposite side. I waved it down and was immediately on my way to my destination.

I enquired about a suitable route to take to avoid any peak hour jams. The cab driver told me one way to Bukit Timah was through Lornie Road and very likely there would be jams to contend with. True enough, along the journey, the highway electronic noticeboard confirmed the bad traffic condition. The driver suggested going by Eng Neo Ave which would most likely be less congested. Alas! This turned out to be inaccurate because we were soon caught in a long line of slow-moving vehicles.

By God's grace, the cab driver was a thoughtful and kind-hearted person. **He volunteered to stop the meter** so that I won't end up with a very expensive trip.

He just knew that I was rushing for a meeting at Bukit Timah Duke's Road. (I did not inform him that I was going to the Church.) He asked me for the time of meeting, and assured me that there would be enough time.

On reaching the destination, the taxi overshot the Redeemer Church by just a few footsteps and I said that I could get off and just walk across the road. The taxi driver insisted on reversing the taxi to drive straight into the Redeemer's front porch.

As I paid for my fare, I decided to let the taxi driver keep the change since I knew that he had stopped the meter for some time along the journey. The driver declined my gesture and insisted on returning to me every cent of the change.

With no need even for a second's wait for a taxi, with the kindness of the cab driver to keep my heart attack at bay over the fast rising fare by stopping the meter while in slow-moving traffic, and by his gentlemanly top-notch service to drive me right into the Redeemer's compound and collecting not a cent more than the reduced metered fare, I felt very relieved. It turned out that not only was I not late for my appointment, I was the first person to turn up at the meeting room after the LCCS Director, Rev. Daniel Ang.

Don't you think that the above experience would be impossible to dream of if not for God's gracious enabling as He knew my situation and my anxiety? †

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## DR SCHROEDER IN SINGAPORE



March 26 – Dr Schroeder has been in Singapore for 28 days already. This is the third and last time he is sharing at JCC. For the two nights he had been sharing about Lutheran theology. Tonight is the last night and he shares with us what is heavy on his heart. All this time that he had been in Singapore, he noticed that the churches in Singapore do not sing Lutheran hymns but rather choruses which come from America. He felt that there was a lack of the richness of Lutheran theology in the modern choruses which we sing repeatedly.

He also wondered why we celebrated the Holy Communion once a month instead of at every service. He mentioned that in his home church, if there were three services on Sunday, then there would be Holy Communion in each of the services and they celebrated Holy Communion every Sunday.

If you go to his website at [www://crossings.org](http://www.crossings.org), you will find a letter he had posted recently:

March 18, 2004

Topic: **First signals from Singapore**

Colleagues,

We've been in Singapore almost three weeks now. I've preached both of the last two Sundays. That's likely to continue, since I'm being "farmed out" to each of the seven congregations that make up the Lutheran Church in Singapore for a two-week stint as "theologian-in-residence." They've even printed a business card for me with that information on one side, and our standard USA specs on the other side. My two weeks now closing at Yishun Christian Church (Lutheran) included an evening seminar on one of the topics I've offered before, "In a Sea of Faiths, Why Jesus?" More on that below. Each congregation is also asking for similar seminars or workshops on topics that they have requested.

Besides these assignments of a fortnight each in the different congregations, I have some "church-wide" duties. Biggest one is an every-Monday-morning seminar with the 20-some pastors in the LCS. They've asked for five sessions on "Lutheran Hermeneutics" and five on the Lutheran Confessions. I started the Hermeneutics gig a week ago with the Augsburg Aha! and this week we practiced that on specific texts, including next Sunday's gospel, using -- you guessed it -- the Crossings matrix for reading and preaching the word of God as law and promise.

The natives are friendly and give me the impression that they want to be more Lutheran. From what I've learned, that links to the fact that very few of the pastors have attended Lutheran seminaries. Not that attending a Lutheran seminary will guarantee much of anything these days. But I digress. The two seminaries here in Singapore, Trinity Theological College and Singapore Bible College, are the alma maters of most of the clergy. Both are ecumenical seminaries, and you can guess from the very names what the respective traditions are. The only specific Lutheran input for the Lutherans at these seminaries in the past has been a course on "Lutheran Distinctives" taught by an expat missionary professor usually from the ELCA or its predecessor bodies. Right now an LCS pastor with a graduate degree from the Lutheran Seminary in Adelaide, Australia, is currently leading this, and of course he's asked me to fill out the rest of the semester of his every-Thursday afternoon sessions.

I mentioned before that there are 20 pastors in the seven congregations. Why 20, you ask? Every congregation is really a Siamese twin, with English speakers and Chinese speakers, each group with its own pastor or pastors, and its own worship and community life.

It's hot and humid, really like St. Louis in July and August. One pastor tells us it's really been cool the last few days, with a low of 76. It will soon be "normal," he says, which means a high of 95. We're still at the end of the monsoon season, with rain almost every day.

Our home is what people call a four-room apartment (the kitchen and two bathrooms don't count). So: living-dining room, the "master" bedroom with bath attached, another room where we have our computer and desks, and another room that we can use for storage, with a single bed -- for visitors! The LCS has provided this apartment for us as part of their agreement with the ELCA mission folks in Chicago who have brokered our presence here as "Global Mission Volunteers."

Marie has spent lots of time working with the computer, which a young Chinese genius named Adele got configured so that we can still access our usual Compuserve e-mail account. The majority culture here is Chinese, although curiously the first official language of this nation-state is English. But nobody speaks it the way we do -- with no accent! Singapore is small, roughly twice the size of the city of St. Louis, and like St. Louis it's almond-shaped. It has 250 square miles and four million inhabitants, we're told. The public transportation system is super-modern. E.g., for the Mass Rail Transit system you buy a piece of plastic, add value to it as needed, tuck it in your wallet, and when you go through the turnstyle you just touch your wallet to a magic space and the gates open. When you leave at your destination and touch another magic space the super-computer calculates the fare you've used and tells you how much you have left on your pass. Why can't we do that in America?

Enough cultural reflections. Now back to that Why Jesus? seminar of last week. In previous classes on this theme we've had discussions on Why Jesus for Muslims, for Buddhists, for Hindus. And I do have some thoughts that make sense to me and often to students. And much of that is gathered from folks who came from those religious traditions into the Christian faith. I listened to hear how they answered the question why Jesus was both Good and New for them when they heard the gospel. A frequent accompanying factor that I've also learned is the power of the person who's doing the Christian witnessing. We heard it last Sunday from the driver who came to pick us up for church: "It was the overwhelming love and concern for me and my wife on the part of Myron and Edith Danford that finally persuaded us."

The new turf about which I was asked last week is the Taoist tradition that permeates the Chinese world. And there I need to talk to more people and have them tell me what's Good and New about Jesus for folks hooked on "harmony" as the way of salvation. Diagnostically, of course, disharmony is the malady but, as I learned from my class that evening, there is no God-factor in the mix. Instead, the cosmic reality is bi-polar. Opposites abound throughout the universe and within each human being. Disharmony comes when they are not kept in balance. Harmony is the opposite. Many practices exist to help make that happen, all the way from Tai Chi to proper nutrition. Even Falun Gong, which we've seen in action on the street, offers its own brand of harmony.

I've got a lot to learn, both about this "other gospel" and what's good and new about a crucified and risen Messiah for Taoists. I remember years ago when a Buddhist master from Japan came to Concordia Seminary and he dialogued with Bob Bertram about harmony. I wish I had taped that session. One thing I remember is Bob articulating the Gospel's alternative to harmony. It was not achieving balance with the realities of the old creation. Instead it was the good news of a new creation. But for that you simply had to talk about the Creator, and also his beloved Son, the cornerstone of that new creation. That also brings to mind an axiom I learned from Kosuke Koyama, that the eastern mind stops in its reality quest at the stuff of heaven and earth, while Biblical theology pushes one step farther, to the Lord who made heaven and earth. That Lord needs to be reckoned with, not just the stuff that came from his creative hand.

As you see, I have some work to do.

Peace & Joy!  
Ed Schroeder

Editor's Note: *Dr Schroeder teaches Lutheran theology. What does the word Lutheran mean? Here is a dictionary definition:*

*[n] follower of Lutheranism*

*[adj] (religion) of or pertaining to or characteristic of the branch of the Protestant Church adhering to the views of Luther; "Lutheran doctrines"*

*[adj] of or pertaining to Martin Luther or his teachings; "the Lutheran doctrine of justification by faith alone"*

*What does this mean? It means that we are interpreting the Bible based on Martin Luther's teaching. If we interpret the Bible based on Calvin's teaching then we will be called Calvinist, or if we follow Pastor Prince's teaching then we will be called New Creationist. Of course if you interpret the Bible based on Martin Cheah's teaching then you are probably learning Charlatan<sup>1</sup> Theology.*

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<sup>1</sup> Means fake, counterfeit, fraud

# More of March in Pictures

**March 14** -The editors were invited to visit Pastor Anthony's house as part of his ongoing house visitation program.

The food was good and the fellowship warm. We were also treated to the Chingay procession which could be viewed from Pastor Anthony's study room window.



**March 20** – The pre-AGM started off with a pot-bless dinner arranged by Sis.



Lissa. Meanwhile in the background, there was a flurry of activity as the preparations for the event hit a technical problem.



As Bro Wong Mui prayed for the Lord to solve our technical problem, the problem was solved even before he finished praying. As pharaoh hardened his heart when he viewed each miracle from God as something ordinary, after all locusts, frogs, flies, etc were common in that part of the world, let us not view this answer to our prayers as just coincidence. Yes, it was just someone pressing the right button after an hour of struggling by about 6 people but the timing was a miracle.

That night, we also welcomed back our dear Pastor Martin Yee.



**March School Holidays** – The BB had their camp in church during the March school holidays.

**March 28 – The 36<sup>th</sup> Annual General Meeting** went very smoothly. This is one of the smoothest AGM that I have ever sat through. English section elected two new councilmen, Goh Young Kwang and Chong Yew Moi, to replace the three, Tan Swee Leong,



Wilfred Kao and Lissa Low, who have completed their term. With no queries raised, the meeting ended even before 12.00pm.

