

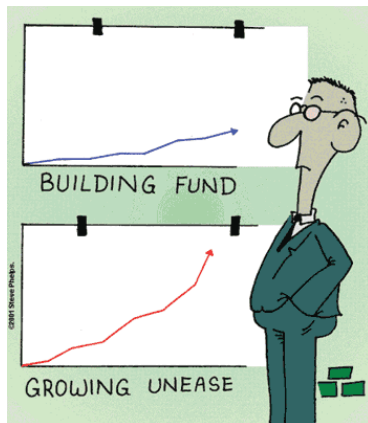
## CHINESE NEW YEAR GREETINGS

We are still in the midst of CNY as I pen down these words. I have already taken my third dish of “Yue Sang” (raw fish salad) and I am sure there will be more to come before CNY ends. However, what is all the fuss about “Yue Sang”? Well, I guess to some people, the sound of the words in Cantonese means business and so they partake of this dish for prosperity or good luck. To those who are very superstitious, the various foods served during CNY all have auspicious sounding names. Maybe that is why I am not successful in the commercial world because my favourite dish is “Wonton” noodles. It sounds very inauspicious like “Wan Tan” meaning finished or kaput.

While we are on the subject of CNY, have you ever wondered what is permissible for a Christian to partake amongst all the CNY traditions? Can we greet each other with the traditional CNY greetings which usually relate to good fortune? Can we exchange “ang pows”? What about wearing red color? It comes as no surprise that there are some

Christians who do not celebrate CNY at all because they cannot distinguish between what is traditional, customs and idol worship.

When discussing how some churches contextualize CNY into a Christian activity by having a service on the 1<sup>st</sup> day, Pastor Yee gave me an insight which I have never seen before. He mentioned that Christmas was actually a pagan festival in the beginning. I vaguely remember that. How



many of you know it? Nowadays when we celebrate Christmas, we only think of the birth of Jesus. How many people celebrate Christmas with the pagan festival in mind? If the church long ago manage to convert a pagan festival to a Christian one, can it be possible that in the future CNY will become a Christian festival? With God nothing is impossible.

In the Jurong West Cell Group CNY celebrations, we contextualize a Christian song with a CNY tune. The song “Pass It On” was sung to the tune of “Kong si, kong si ni”. Try singing it:

### PASS IT ON

Sung to the tune of “Kong si, kong si ni”

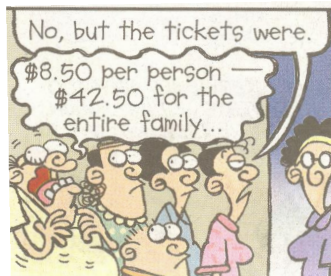
It only takes a spark....  
To start the fire going...  
And soon all those a...round  
Can warm up in it's glowing...

That's how it is with God's.. love (2x)

Once you have experienced it  
You'll spread His love...  
To.... Everyone  
You want to pass it on....

That's how it is with God's.. love (2x)

May we have a blessed new year ahead as we enjoy God's love and we want to spread His love to everyone.



*Martin Cheah*

## Joke circulating in e-mail

### **May I Smoke?**

Jack and Max are walking from religious service. Jack wonders whether it would be all right to smoke while praying. Max replies, "Why don't you ask the Priest?"

So Jack goes up to the Priest and asks, "Father, may I smoke while I pray?"

The Priest replies, "No, my son, you may not! That's utter disrespect to our religion."

Jack goes back to his friend and tells him what the good Priest told him. Max says, "I'm not surprised. You asked the wrong question. Let me try."

And so Max goes up to the Priest and asks, "Father, may I pray while I smoke?"

To which the Priest eagerly replies, "By all means, my son. By all means. You can always pray whenever you want to."

Moral of the story is... The reply you get depends on the question you ask.

## To be a Shepherd

What will it take for you to become a leader who shepherds the flock of God entrusted to your care? Let me be so bold as to make a few suggestions:

- Be sure you are praying regularly for those you are called to lead. Don't merely give a nod of ascent to this idea, practice it daily!
- Be generous with your affirmation and appreciation of those who are a part of your team. Do this with words and with action; be creative in expressing heartfelt thanks this coming week!
- Be available to assist each of your woolly followers in their ongoing growth and development. Don't merely invite them on to the team and then abandon them in their service—become alert to the training and resources needed for their area of service, ask them what they need and do everything possible to meet their needs!

- Be aware of who on the team could step into your shoes at a moment's notice and begin today in considering your legacy. Don't assume you will be in your place of leadership forever—in fact, consider prayerfully how you can give your role away to the next generation of leaders!

The greatest gift you can give as a shepherd is love. When followers know that their leader loves them with sincerity of heart, both the leader and the team will flourish together. Leaders, for Jesus' sake, eagerly shepherd the flock under your care with grace, joy, kindness and love. This is what the world of ministry needs most from you today.

The Rev. Dr. Stephen A. Macchia

# Four Principles to Membership Retention

by Dr. Thom Rainer

In almost every consultation I conduct through my company, the Rainer Group, and in almost every church I research, the issue of assimilation arises. "If we could just keep the people who join our church, our attendance would be twice as high," church leaders often lament. Is there a "secret" to retention? Is there some type of process that can close the back door?

While there is neither a secret nor a neatly-packaged process, there are four key principles to membership retention and involvement.

Assimilation is built on four key principles.

The first principle is **expectation**. Church membership was not the placement of a name on a roll; the clear expectation was that the member was to make a difference through the ministries of the church. Giving was not touted as optional but expected among church members. And membership or inquirer classes were often the place where these expectations were most clearly articulated.

The second principle is **ministry involvement**. If a church member does not become meaningfully involved in some type of ministry in the church, his or her drop-out chances increase dramatically. But the church leadership cannot delay in moving new members to places of ministry. If more than six months lapses between the points of new membership to ministry involvement, the person will likely be already moving toward inactivity in the life of the church.



Probably the most often cited principle is **relationships**. What many church leaders do not realize is that the development of these relationships with new members best takes place before the member joins. If the new member has no relationship with a church member when he or she joins the church, it is exceedingly difficult to create relationships.

The fourth of the principles is **small-group involvement**. There are many venues for such involvement: discipleship groups, home cell groups, ministry teams, and choirs and praise teams, to name a few. Our research shows that the most effective assimilation group is the Sunday school, which is the open-ended small group that typically meets on the church campus. A person involved in a Sunday school class is five times more likely to be active in the church five years later, than a person who attends worship services alone.



These principles are not mutually exclusive. Indeed they often complement or even support one another. But they are all critical to the assimilation and discipleship health of the church.

It is also our desire to see these new converts and new church members become truly effective disciples for Christ. These four principles often accomplish that goal and help the church to close the back door even more tightly.

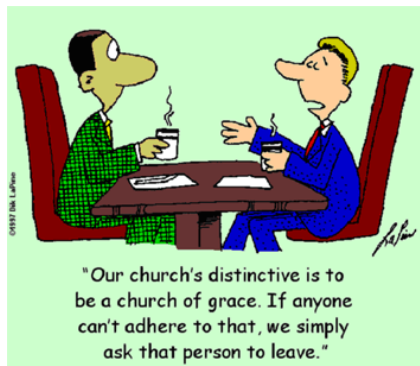
**Thom S. Rainer** is dean of the Billy Graham School at [Southern Baptist Theological Seminary](#) in Louisville, Ky. The author of 14 books, he also serves as president of the Rainer Group and Church Central Associates.

## Greeters Tips

A firm handshake and a warm smile can be such simple gestures, yet many church leaders are finding they can also be powerful tools for getting newcomers to make return visits.

Visitors are more likely to return to a church, leaders say, if they are genuinely welcomed.

- Greeters should arrive 30 minutes before the service start.
- Greeters should stand near entrances.
- Don't be pushy. Some visitors will not want to give personal information on their first visit.
- Greeters should be prepared to hand out bulletins, answer questions, give directions or escort visitors.
- After a visitor walks away, watch to see if they appear lost or confused and offer assistance.
- Don't be afraid to ask if someone is a visitor. Make good eye contact.
- Welcome everyone, not just visitors.
- Recruit greeters among newcomers, who remember what it is like to visit the church for the first time.



## **Wishing you a Happy Chinese New Year & a Blessed Lenten Season**

Happy Chinese New Year. Peace and goodwill to all in this Lenten season.

9<sup>th</sup> of February 2005 is the first day of both the Chinese New Year and the Lenten season; hence, the double greetings.

When people greet one another Happy Chinese New Year, it is implied that there is reason to be happy. However, if legend is to be believed, the lunar New Year is an occasion for fear. You know, a legend has it that a long time ago, the *nian* (年) was a monster that would come out on the new year's eve to feast on people and animals. But the monster was afraid of the colour red and loud noises. Hence, we have the Chinese tradition of hanging out red banners (春联) and the firing of red firecrackers to chase away the monster.

Of course we all don't believe in such nonsense. But do we still understand the real meaning of all the traditional practices associated with the New Year celebrations, or do we simply follow them since young without question until they become second nature in our minds? What reason is there for us to be happy on this occasion? What comes first? Children are happy because they have new clothes to wear and receive angpows; adults are happy for the holidays (a break from the drudgery of work); or is it supposed to be a happy occasion and so we buy new clothes for the children and give them angpows to add to their good cheer?

In fact, Chinese New Year is called the Spring Festival (春节) in China. Now, when talking of spring, there is a good reason to celebrate. Spring is also harvest time and the joyous spirit is recorded in the familiar Mandarin festive song 大地回春, which resonates a softness in the air as flowers bloom, the fields are beautifully dressed in green, the birds appear and loving couples stroll in the breeze, the touching scene made complete by the entrancing accompaniment of dancing butterflies and

humming bees in the background. (欢迎大地回春，枝头儿朵朵花如景，原野层层草如茵，燕子归来寻旧巢，双双呢喃诉衷情，大地万象更新，蝴蝶儿翩翩舞倩影，蜜蜂儿嗡嗡采花粉，情侣漫步暖风里，一片春色动人情，桃李正放红白相映...) Spring comes after winter, and the change from the greys and browns of winter to the captivating red-white contrast of peach and plum blossoms of spring is a marvel to behold. Without a doubt, the revival of spring is a signal of fresh energy and a new life. Good harvest and blessings from heaven as spring dawns on the land! This is the spirit of the Spring Festival, a time for joyful celebrations. Let's not forget God in our celebration, for the wonders of spring and the love of God are intimately conjoined in the promise that we look forward to in a New Year. Undeniably, the wondrous time of spring is an eloquent reminder of how it is with God's love, as we know by the popular hymn we sing often, "Pass It On":

*"What a wondrous time is spring when all the trees are budding  
The birds begin to sing, the flowers start their blooming  
That's how it is with God's love  
Once you've experienced it  
You want to sing, it's fresh like spring  
You want to pass it on  
I wish for you my friend, this happiness that I've found  
You can come join in, it matters not where you're bound  
..."*

There is no greater message of God's love for mankind than the fact that Christ gave His life as propitiation for our sin. He paid the ultimate price for our salvation. "This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us." (1 John 4:10-12)

We are in the season of Lent, which is a time for reflection and taking stock. Think of our gratitude to God for the torture that Christ went through on the Cross, so that as we remember His suffering and apply



the message to share the love of God with one another for the benefit of Kingdom's glory, we can feel the stillness in our heart in our Lenten observance, knowing that our Lord's suffering was not in vain.

We are at the beginning of a Chinese New Year. A beginning is also the most appropriate time to look forward to a renewal in our life (生活中万象更新) as we reflect and take stock of the year gone by – what we have done, what we have achieved or failed in, how we have been glorifying God and enjoying His blessings, and so forth. Suppose you are driving up peninsula Malaysia. Along the way, you stop at different points to take stock of your tummy in need of food, your body in need of refreshing, and your car in need of petrol replenishment. Day by day, month by month and year by year, we are travelling our life journey. Think of the Chinese New Year as a point along our journey, the end of one part and the beginning of another part, where we stop to take stock of the year gone by. Count our blessings (which should not be classified only by \$\$ and cents) and celebrate with hope for another year. Think of the source of our blessings (饮水思源):

"They will celebrate your abundant goodness and joyfully sing of your righteousness." ~*Psalm 145:7*~

"This is the day which the LORD hath made; we will rejoice and be glad in it." ~*Psalms 118:24*~

A bible commentary has this instruction, "God satisfies the desire of every living thing, except the unreasonable children of men, who are satisfied with nothing.

Non-Christians who find inspiration to celebrate based on the Chinese zodiac have some interesting things to say about the New Year. If it is the year of the monkey, they would chirp, "Oh, it is good



to celebrate. We can be like the monkeys - clever, flexible, innovative and confident. When things happen, we can be nimble, take advantage of opportunities, not cast down, but rising to the challenge.” If it is the year of the goat, they might say, “Oh, let’s celebrate for all the best we can be, sure-footed and hardy, blah, blah, blah.” Now, we know that according to the zodiac we are in the year of the Rooster. I do not know what good there is about the Rooster that we can celebrate, but I do feel puzzled at the sight of a big rooster on display in town sitting on a pile of eggs (a rooster laying eggs?) and the funniness of an advertisement on TV that sees men and women laying eggs by flapping their arms.

I think a bit of inane humour or allowing ourselves some understanding of and fascination with the ways of the non-Christians in their celebration of the Chinese New Year is alright, as it gives us useful insight and facilitates social intercourse. However, Christians do not celebrate Chinese New Year the way the pagan world celebrates, steeped in superstitions. Some of the traditions are ok – like giving angpows and buying new clothes. We do all these without really embracing the original superstitious ideas. We can let children fire crackers (if this is allowed by the government and poses no danger) just for the kids’ fun of noise-making without really believing that a monster is on the prowl. If the traditional things that we do have lost their superstitious meaning, they let us have a lesson or two about our cultural heritage while causing no harm. However, if practices still carry superstitious beliefs, or what we do will stumble our brother, then we ought not be involved in them. We can hang out red banners of Chinese couplets as the traditional Chinese do, like what the picture shows of three banners that were actually hung at the doorway to a church in China last year. The words on the banners are:

神爱世人 (God loves the world)

传扬圣经救世真道(Spread the bible message of salvation)

颂赞基督和平福音(Praise Christ for the Gospel of peace)

In conclusion, I refer you to the well-known Chinese couplet that is popularly put up by the Chinese during the New Year celebration:

天增岁月人增寿、春满乾坤福满门。(Man adds to his age as heaven adds another year. Households fill with blessings as the universe fills with spring.) Think of the connection “heaven-spring-blessing”. As Christians, we remind ourselves that God (heaven) is looking over us as spring makes its entry. While spring brings to the land an energizing renewal, let us not forget the recharging of our life as we also reflect on the meaning of Lent as a season for soul-searching and repentance, remembering that the Person behind the season is no other than Jesus Christ our Lord. Won't you agree that both the Chinese New Year and Lent are seasons for sharing of love? Rejoice in the Lord always for His love is fresh like spring and that once we have experienced it, we will want to pass it on.

*John Lee*

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Getting to know our

## **JURONG CHRISTIAN CHURCH KINDERGARTEN**

The Jurong Christian Church Kindergarten (JCCK) is very much an active ministry extension of the Jurong Christian Church.

Over the decades of its existence, with the changing physical and educational landscapes, the Kindergarten has been a popular choice among parents in the Taman Jurong and nearby areas. The photo shows only a section of our enrolment at the 2004 Graduation cum Concert.



We are pleased with the trust that parents have on us for their children's pre-school development. They have been great in their partnership and support by way of collaboration between the home and the kindergarten in bringing out the best of each child. Besides, we also appreciate very much the many parent-volunteers who happily busy themselves in some of our activities.

In her message at the JCKK Graduation cum Concert, Mrs Leong-Ho Shoo Mei, Chairman of the JCKK Management Committee, recorded her thanks to all parents for being a source of encouragement to the staff, welcoming them to continue keeping in touch and joining us in our major functions. She also expressed her gratitude to the pastoral staff and members of Jurong Christian Church for their involvement in various activities – meet-the-parents occasions, New Year celebration, National Day celebration, etc.

We were greatly honoured to have our Minister for Education, Mr Tharman, to grace the occasion with his contingent including Ministry officials, the supervisor of the PCF



Kindergartens, CCC Chairman and other grassroots leaders. We were gladdened by the Minister's positive and encouraging comments about our operations. It did not escape his observation that our teachers are committed; and in response to his question about how we got these dedicated teachers, our Principal cheerfully responded, "God sent them." Indeed, we have to thank God for blessing JCKK with good teachers to be a blessing to the little tots entrusted to our care.

To help you understand better the JCKK operations and its approach towards new challenges, here is a reproduction of a portion of the

speech by Mrs Leong, who is also a Council member of Jurong Christian Church:

*“Today is a happy occasion for all of us. 86 of our children would be graduating from our kindergarten and we have prepared them mentally and socially to move on to their next stage of formal education.*

*“In the education scene, we have witnessed many changes recently. Our leaders are aware of the new challenges ahead for our younger generations and our country. Many of the new initiatives and fine-tuning of Singapore education policies attest to this fact. We in the Kindergarten service are at the ground level of the education hierarchy to nurture them and develop their enquiring mind through play and investigation. Children by nature are curious and they keep asking questions, and there is a need to keep this fire burning in them. Character development and building of self-confidence are also critical in the development of the child.*

*“Capacity building does not just apply to our children but also our teachers. We place strong emphasis on the development of teachers' competencies and teachers need to be competent before they can bring our children to the next level.*

*“The Pre-school unit has stipulated that by the year 2008 all pre-school teachers should be trained, and 1 out of 4 trained teachers must be a diploma holder. I am glad to share that in 2004, 10 of our 11 full-time teachers are trained and the remaining teacher is presently undergoing training and will complete her training by next year. Among the trained teachers, 4 are diploma-holders in pre-school education. Besides, our administrator who assists the Principal is also a diploma holder in pre-school education. Our kindergarten has a capable and competent principal, Mrs Joanna Tan, who has a Bachelor degree in Science and possesses the Specialist Diploma in pre-school leadership.*

*“The staff are adopting the play approach and “integrated learning” for the children. For example, when the children learned about the life of the amphibian, they visited the frog farm to observe and learn about the life cycle of the frog and other information about the amphibian.*

*“When children learn about ‘Weather’, activities such as ‘pretend play’ are added to the learning experience. Children put on raincoats, carry umbrellas and wear boots, and the teachers would splash or spray water on them. They have fun learning through play and in the process also pick up vocabulary related to the concept. There are also follow-up activities where opportunities are given to the children to discover for themselves.*

*“I was told that one day the children sat at the canopy area when it was raining; they observed the rain fall, they discussed among themselves and words like ‘bubbles’ and ‘ripples’ came into the picture. It is through such programmes that the children have become more expressive and more confident.*

*“When teachers facilitate learning, we ‘teach less’ and want the children to play, explore and ‘learn more’. ‘Teach Less Learn More’ - TLLM – was also what our Prime Minister advocated in this year’s National Day Rally Speech.*



*“We would like to take this opportunity to assure parents that they need not worry that there is too much play and not enough homework. Our programmes are balanced and we observed that our children learn more through*

*self-discovery and play and that has reinforced the mental development.*

*“From beginning of this year, we have allocated two teachers for every class. Our teacher-children ratio is small and this has helped us to give better individual attention to the children and to facilitate the integrated learning.*

*“As we reflect on what we have done over these years, we are pleased that we have made some progress, and we will continue to strive for improvement.”*



Hopefully, after reading this, you will have a better understanding of the Jurong Christian Church Kindergarten, which is very much a part of the Jurong Christian Church. The Management of the Kindergarten continues to covet the active support of the body of Christ in the church.

May all of us continue to be blessed to be a blessing through the ministry of JCKK.

John Lee

## OLD FOLKS CHINESE NEW YEAR GATHERING

Iris was very skeptical about the attendance of Bethel CG's CNY



Old Folks gathering because it was Chinese New Year and she wasn't expecting anyone to go to all the trouble of bringing their old folks all the way to Clover Crescent, which is hidden in Bishan. However, to her great surprise, as the people came streaming in, Iris and family

had to start getting chairs out of their storeroom to provide seats for all the people and some of the younger one had to sit on the stairs.

Peter Cheong provided the singspiration in Hokkien and then the old folks were shown a dialect video produced by Covenant EFC. After a tea break, the speaker gave a message in Hokkien followed by an altar call. Although no one had raised their hands, I believe that the ground has been softened. We will definitely want to bring this group of oldies to our upcoming retreat and present them with the Gospel again.



Pray for God's mercy to be granted to these dearly beloved.