

## Editor's Word

After 8 years of waiting, here is the picture you have been waiting for. On 26 December 2005, Joseph and Florene are officially Mr & Mrs Joseph Liang.

Marriage is a great occasion to bring people together, not only Joseph and Florene but also all their relatives and friends. This is one time when people of different religions are willing to step into a church. Indeed it is a great opportunity for outreach, even greater than inviting Marilyn Baker.

Many times we leave the outreach to just the preacher. We do not make a conscious effort to do outreach during such an occasion like we do in a concert or musical. There is no effort put in to try to strike up conversations with the relatives or friends of the couple. Tracts are not given out. Even the leaders of the church probably, just converse with their members rather than strangers.

Why is this opportunity missed? We always think of grand plans to attract people to church but here they are in droves and we leave them alone. Is it because the bride and groom do not wish their guests to be subjected to the evangelism efforts of the church? I think not. Most couples wish that their relatives and friends could be saved too.

Maybe we should look into an Evangelism Plan which is suitable for such an occasion and start preparing ourselves for the next time.



A man is incomplete until he is married. After that, he is finished.

-- Zsa Zsa Gabor

There is no more lovely, friendly and charming relationship, communion or company than a good marriage

-- Martin Luther

I have found the paradox that if I love until it hurts, then there is no hurt, but only more love.

-- Mother Teresa

*Martin Cheah*

# Pastor's Word

Chinese funeral rites have two focus, one is to pay respect to the parents and give them honour by bowing or offering incense, burning paper money for their use in the next life, burning effigies of car, clothes, houses, maids...etc. to provide them with what they need in the next life. All these come from a strong belief that the person who is dead will live in another world - the spirit world, and that world is not much different from the current world. They will need to eat, sleep, use money, have clothing, houses, cars...etc.

The other focus is on appeasing the spirit world to treat the parents well and also to invoke the blessings of their parents who have now joined the spirit world. This fear of the spirit world is also mixed with a desire to get blessing from them.

Are we then committing idolatry if we take part in these Chinese funeral rites for our departed parents? Idolatry is forbidden by the first commandment "You shall have no other gods before me" (Deut 5:7). Luther's Small Catechism explained the meaning of this commandment "We are to fear, love and trust God above anything else."

When we fear, love and trust something or someone more than God then we break this commandment. Furthermore, when our motivation is fear of the spirits; even our own parents who will haunt us if we don't do the rites carefully; then we are breaking this commandment by taking part in the funeral rituals. However, if we do these rites out of fear, love and trust only for God above anything else, then we have not broken this commandment. When we fear, love and trust God to keep us safe from the evil spirits and we do not trust in the rituals to protect us nor keep our departed parents safe to the other side, then we have not relied upon this rite to save us in any way, then our conscience before God would be clear.

If the ritual involves praying to the idols directly and bowing down to them, then we should stay away from these parts of the rituals as taking part in these rituals of worshipping the idols will mean that we are also appeasing the idols and we are telling our relatives that we have a need of that and our faith in Christ counts for nothing.

Instead, in our Chinese cultural context, if we take part in the Chinese funeral ritual for the sake of showing respect to our dearly departed and in consideration of our relative's feelings, we might actually prevent non-believers from wrongly accusing the Christian God and prevent people from taking the name of our God in vain (Second Commandment, Deut. 5: 11) because by participating, our non-believing relatives will realise that Christians also honour their parents and their elders.



By not participating we would most likely provoke our relatives to think of Christian children as not being filial to their departed parents, that Christians have turned to a Western God and their Asian values of being filial had changed. We will then have caused them to scorn the name and person of Christ who we identify totally with as Christians. So if we do love God, we will also love his Son, Jesus Christ and will not want our relatives to think poorly of Christ and us as Christians.



In conclusion, we should be careful how our actions can cause non-believers to misunderstand who God is. Whether we take part or not depend not on the outward action alone but on our inner heart - whether we fear, love and trust God above anything else.

*Pastor Samuel Wang*

# THE **DEATH** OF *GRACE*

31<sup>st</sup> December 2005 - The SMS came at 8.30 am in the morning. Auntie Grace had passed away a few minutes earlier. The night before, an e-mail had gone out telling us she was hospitalized for pneumonia, and she was warded at Tan Tock Seng Hospital, Ward 9B Bed 49. However, I did not read that e-mail because we had a CG gathering that night. During that meeting, we were sharing about how strong Auntie Grace was and how she must have loved her son even though she complained about his lack of concern for her.

Now to my shock, she is gone. She did seem rather weak last Sunday when she went up for Holy Communion and had to be helped up by sister Betsy, but it did not occur to me that it would be the last time I would be seeing her.



I remember some years back when she had asked me to take her photos. I believe then that she thought she might be going home soon but it did not happen and up to last night, I had thought she would continue to live a long life but I was proved wrong.

She was well prepared to go home and she had a chance to bid farewell to those closest to her, including Pastor Michael Christian, who happened to be back from Nias at this time. The timing too was perfect because it was a holiday and many of us could attend to her final service at the Mandai Crematorium.

As we start 2006 without Auntie Grace, will our lives be filled with a little less grace? Pastor Samuel recounts to us that she asked us not to cry for her because she is going to a better place. Let us then remember Auntie Grace with joy that we will meet again one day on that beautiful shore and she won't be that frail old lady anymore but have a new body.



*Martin Cheah*

## John Lee Remembers Fondly

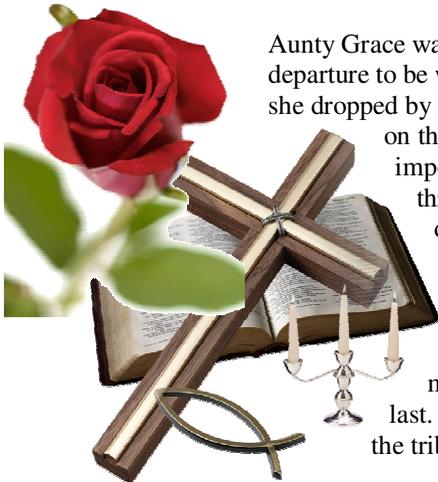
Our dearly loved Aunty Grace passed away peacefully on the morning of 31<sup>st</sup> December, as the year 2005 drew to a close.

Many of us fondly remember her as a woman of faith, and sadness was written all over the faces of brothers and sisters in Christ who crowded the funeral parlour at her wake. Tears were also easily shed by some as stories were recounted about Aunty Grace's generosity as a person (despite being poor) and her indomitable faith in Christ.

Revd Martin Yee, in delivering his tribute, said it perfectly that the wake was like no other wake, very extraordinary in many ways. Indeed, the extraordinariness was befitting a very unique lady who was called home to be with her beloved Lord at a very unique timing. In her last moments in this world, she made good use of the opportunity to call to her bedside Pastors Martin Yee, Samuel Wang and Michael Christian and a good number of her cherished sons and daughters of Jurong Christian Church to bid her farewell.

Before she passed away, she knew it was time for her to go as she had led a very full 83 years of life. She had insisted on attending our Christmas service just days before despite advice for her to rest at home in view of her ill health. The reason she gave for her insistence was that it would be her last Christmas celebration with us.

On one occasion recently, she handed out angpows to the children of Pastor Samuel and she was firm in asking that they be accepted, saying that it was the last opportunity for her to do so.



Aunty Grace was a woman who even prepared herself for her departure to be with the Lord as early as three years ago when she dropped by Revd Yee's office with specific instructions on the things she wanted to have with her on her important day of farewell – a bible, three roses and three orchids, a cross ... These instructions were duly followed at her funeral, and Revd Yee told the moving story of this woman who knew exactly what she wanted, whose living testimony of plain and simple faith in Christ Jesus and whose love for all in the Church was manifest up to the moment she breathed her last. A wake unlike any other wake it was – After the tribute by Revd Yee, it was very obvious how

the petite old lady had been so spiritually influential in the lives of her sons and daughters in the church when one by one they stood up to pay their own tributes, to share their farewell message with tears to remember a dearly missed Auntie by.

Dearly beloved and dearly missed Auntie Grace: You lived a simple life, but your simple testimony of trust in your Lord Jesus was powerful and touched all hearts. Financially poor, spiritually rich; physically frail, mentally strong – whatever is apt to describe you is not as important as the fact that God has finally received you into His presence, because you have fought the good fight according to His will, you have finished the race in your pilgrimage to this world, and you have kept the faith to the end. As your fellow pilgrims in this world, we have much to learn from your example of unwavering faith in Christ, our Lord.



*Auntie Grace's ashes are placed at:*  
**All Saints Memorial Chapel**  
5 Poh Huat Road  
Singapore 546703.  
Blk 2 Room 2, Niche number 177

## MISSION COMMITTEE FUND RAISING PROJECT



If you happen to see a table set up at the fellowship hall selling cards and stuff, don't pass it by. Stop and contribute for the purchase of 1 or 2 computers for the children of Phibun, Northern Thailand. 100% of the funds will be channeled to this purpose.

JCC is seriously considering engaging in mission work in this place. A good way to



start is to provide them with a PC or two.

**"You can give without loving. But you cannot love without giving."** -- Amy Carmichael, missionary to India

# THANKSGIVING SERVICE

31<sup>st</sup> December 2005 – As I rushed back from Auntie Grace's wake service, I was just in time to listen to all the testimonies of God's goodness to us in 2005. Nancy was the first to come up when the invitation to share was given. She shared her about her struggles with cancer and how this has increased her faith and she is now able to trust God for her healing.



Dorothy shared about her experience in Nias and the joy of being able to help the orphans and also of witnessing their faith.

Kang Lian also shared about her fight with cancer and about the goodness of God in helping her through this battle.



Lissa revealed to us the estranged relationship with her daughter and how they were reconciled on Christmas Eve when her daughter came to church with her boyfriend.



Finally, Ronnie came up to share about his struggles and blessings experienced in Shanghai and Singapore. He shared about the 10 things he asked of God and how 8 of them had been answered already.

As I did not bring my notebook or voice recorder, I am not able to give you fuller details of their testimonies. You have got to be here to listen for yourselves. However in summary, I would say that God is moving through our midst with healing for our sickness and broken relationships. The key word is FAITH to trust in God for the blessings.



May the Almighty God bless us in 2006 as we continue to trust in His goodness to us.

*Martin Cheah*

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"If I had 1,000 lives, I'd give them all for China" -- Hudson Taylor



盲人福音事工  
**Gospel Mission To The Blind Ltd**  
 8 Lorong 27A Geylang #02-06 Guilin Building Singapore 388106 Tel: 6741 4490  
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26 November 2005

Jurong Christian Church  
 2 Tah Ching Road  
 Jurong Town  
 Singapore 618744

Dear Brothers & Sisters in Christ,

Psalms 34:8 Taste and see that the LORD is good; blessed is the man who takes refuge in him.  
 With much gratitude and thanks, we enclose herewith our receipt for your gift to GMB.

Wee Shen, a new convert, shared a testimony which really encouraged us. On 26 October she visited her late father's niche with her family. And she made up her mind not to burn incense to the dead or eat any food that has been offered in worship to idols or to the dead. She said that she knew that God was watching her, and even though she loves the special "kuay kuay" that her mother makes, she would not eat it since it will be offered in worship. And to her surprise, her mother told the family that out of the three special cakes that she had made, they were to use only one cake for the worship of the dead, so that Wee Shen could enjoy the other two cakes. We were so happy to see a new believer being so serious in her relationship with the Lord. She is so happy to experience the goodness of the Lord, and that He is with her all the time, guiding her and watching over her.

Please uphold the following new contacts that were referred to us - Lim Lay Mui, Chan Kiok Yong, Chow Boon Chin and Chong Fui Hua. Please pray that they will soon receive salvation and grow to become useful instruments for the Lord's use.

Please pray for Soh Hare Lim, that he will be totally delivered from alcohol. He experienced a breakthrough some time ago, but is now drinking again.

Thank you for your partnership. May the abundant goodness and blessings of the Lord be upon all of you and your families.

Your sister in the Lord,

*Choo*

Cheong Cheng Choo.



Alan and Karen Soh presented their new born son, Nehemiah for baptism on Christmas Day. We thank God for His Grace given to the 3<sup>rd</sup> child of Alan and Karen.

**"God's work done in God's way will never lack God's supply"**

-- Hudson Taylor



**NEHEMIAH  
 BAPTISED  
 ON CHRIST-  
 MAS DAY  
 2005**

Alan and Karen Soh presented their new born son, Nehemiah

**"The mark of a great church is not its seating capacity, but its sending capacity." -- Mike Stachura**

## *My, what a year!*

It's human nature to do a few things at the start of the year:

1. Make new year resolutions
2. Look back the past year, only to
3. Recall only the most recent events >> the "recency" effect

I have multiple journals I kept on the hard disk drive, and backed up on another. That has helped me review what I could not recall beyond the most recent happenings.

### **2005**

In February 2005, I was waiting for the season of Spring in my life. Coincidentally, that was the Chinese New Year and spring cleaning I did – not for the soul, but for the household. The February 2005 spring cleaning was the first in seven years, and apart from the seven years' worth of trash, I also had surprise finds, ranging from a child's tooth, tot-sized toys mixed up with the kitchen cutlery, children's lost booties, and so on.

The house was in order, finally. However, I was at war within myself. Multiple organizational restructuring saw me move across four departments and three different floors in the building, all within a span of six years. The up side was it reinforced my minimalist attitude. I did daily housekeeping and was decisive with what paperwork gets thrown out. All my files were electronically organised. There were no personal effects in the office save for that trusty make up kit for emergency touch-ups. One has to look good, no matter what! Hence, with each move, I could carry my stuff and make no more than two rounds before I settle in at the new desk.

As they say, those who get to move get to stay on the job. In hindsight, I was lucky. However, with each move, two things exacerbated: my problems at work and with who I was at work. I could not reconcile within myself and I started having dreams about people. When I wasn't dreaming, I wasn't sleeping either.

I had so many struggles, my journals read like the modern day Job listing in the OT. In 2005, I was tossed in thankfulness and watchfulness. I was thankful whenever God saw me through yet another turmoil or even upheaval. There is a Chinese idiom that says yi(4) bo(1) wei(4) ping(2), yi(4) bo(1) you(4) qi(3). It means new waves form even before the present currents die down. This held so true for me. Every episode that closed on my life sprouted another. I became watchful. I wasn't anticipating anything good, but the next battle. I got tired and decided to stop readying myself with resources to fight another battle. Shang(4) di(4) you(4) gen(1) wo(3) kai(1) le(4) yi(2) ge(4) hen(3) da(4) de(4) wan(2) xiao(4). Each time something goes real wrong, I could only tell God that He's played a joke on me – AGAIN.

## **I do not have Your mind, God**

I was totally baffled at how things at work have turned out and progressed from bad to worse. Six years ago this job with the government agency came as a godsend after I was retrenched. I was out of work and finances were dwindling. I could not pull the kids out of child care centre in case I find work but lose their places at the centre. After months of despair in a quiet job market, the job offer came with a generous pay raise that placed me on par with my peers. I couldn't be more thankful.

Life at work saw its bright days, but the dark ones were far more. By my last year on the job in 2005, I poured out so much sorrows and questions to God. I couldn't understand how a blessing (the job) could turn into something so wrong and cruel. I drew closer to God in the process, though I did not find the answer to why I was placed on a job that saw me embroiled in war with others and myself. I felt persecuted. It was hard to think Christian, I felt like a laughing stock.

## **Imagery**

Two images filled my mind each time I pray. I was always praying, every situation prompted me to pray. Each time I prayed and most times silently, I felt I was pleading so hard and could just imagine my knees knock the ground. There were even occasions when I felt so bad that I could literally feel I was storming heaven's doors!

## **Self-discovery**

Eventful 2005 reinforced these lessons:

1. Every problem is an opportunity to look up. When we are weak, He is strong. Paul recounted in 2 Cor 12:7-10  
*<sup>7</sup>To keep me from becoming conceited because of these surpassingly great revelations, there was given me a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me. <sup>8</sup>Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. <sup>9</sup>But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. <sup>10</sup>That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.*
2. Problems are reminders that God is on our side, are we on His?
3. It does not matter when you die; it matters where you go when you die.
4. God never asked you to stop while you seek His directions. Keep moving.
5. As long as you keep talking to God and reading His Word, God gives you wisdom and opens doors to alternatives you can exercise.
6. Let go. Rest is an option. God created toil and rest. If you feel you have kept up the faith and the fight, let go. Leave the rest to God. I did that after six years on the same job. I consulted God. I may not be employed again, but God may call me to another vocation – corporate life or not. In Christ, we never truly retire; we always exist for a calling.

7. Patience is a virtue, though it is hardly mine. I will stop short at antics that waste my time, rot my life and compromise the values I hold dear. Integrity is fast losing its shine to instant fame and gain. Hold fast to integrity at all costs. The truth will set you free. At the end of the day, try and ensure staying in Band 1 when you testify to God on Judgment Day. Don't aim for 100%, for none of us would qualify.
8. Oh, and there is no reason not to keep your make-up on, on good days and bad :) Jesus said in the gospels that you don't have to look dreadful to prove the point, right? Jesus taught in Matt 6:16-18

*<sup>16</sup>"When you fast, do not look somber as the hypocrites do, for they disfigure their faces to show men they are fasting. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full. <sup>17</sup>But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, <sup>18</sup>so that it will not be obvious to men that you are fasting, but only to your Father, who is unseen; and your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you."*

## Conclusion

Pray anywhere, anytime, when you are: in the queue, at your desk, waiting for someone and seething away, next in line to use the ATM, and even when you are not up to it. Nobody will ever die from praying.

God is already in tomorrow. He does not need your account of what has happened or what you think will happen. God does not need the details or your instructions to work His wonder. Jesus said in Matt 6:7-8

*<sup>7</sup>"And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words. <sup>8</sup>Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him."*

God's answer to prayers: (choose one)

- (1) Yes
- (2) No
- (3) Wait
- (4) All of the above

What do you think?

My parting shot to you is with (3), it feels like eternity and adds anxiety to uncertainty. Like me, patience may not be your virtue.

2006 resolution: Keep storming heaven's doors!      ■□■□■

*Charlotte Sam*

**"Never pity missionaries; envy them. They are where the real action is -- where life and death, sin and grace, Heaven and Hell converge." -- Robert C. Shannon**

# My First Mission Trip



It has been my prayer to go for a mission trip. During my poly days, I had always wanted to go for the mission trips that Campus Crusade had organized. However, my requests were always turned down by my mother. God reminded me that He works in His own perfect timing.

I prayed.

Finally on 23<sup>rd</sup> November 05, I landed on the land of smiles... Thailand!!!

Many things had happened before the trip. I was facing some spiritual warfare which led me to question myself if I was ready for this trip and whether I should go for the trip. God was gracious and so loving that He affirmed with me that He's always there with me. As He promised, He will never leave us nor forsake us. I was reminded that our enemy is constantly working very hard to stop Christians from doing God's work. How could I stop myself from doing God's work when someone out there has been working hard against me?

There were news that bird flu cases had been found in Thailand and many who died were from the rural areas. There was also a prediction that there would be earthquakes coming down on North Thailand as well. Fears were created in me initially but again God spoke. If God is for us, who can be against us? With His affirmation, I knew it was the time that He wanted me to go. I chose to go by faith, carrying Christ's name with me in all that I do and not to be deceived by the evil ones. Thank God for His words of affirmation and encouragement. Here, I shall share about my personal encounters and experiences throughout the trip.

## The People & their Lifestyle



The simple and humble lifestyle of the Thais always reminded me to be contented with what I have. As I interacted with the people, mainly the kids, I realized that their smiles were always on their faces.

The joy they showed through their smiles was genuine. I may not know what struggles or difficulty they may be facing behind those smiles but one thing I know for sure – the

reason for these smiles is Christ. Among the churches we visited, I see one common thing in them. When all the members gathered together, I saw a family!

After the church service, they would prepare lunch for all. As we sat around the table or on the floor and ate together, I felt a sense of belonging. We may be of different nationalities, but in Christ we are one big family. Even on weekdays, the members of Nonghan church will also gather together for every meal. The closeness among the members is something I admire.

Thais are generally a shy people but they are hospitable, friendly and approachable. On one occasion, a girl name Lisa was always around wherever we went. She served us food and drinks and when our cups were empty, she refilled it for us. She would stand a distance away and observe us. When we took the initiative to interact with the kids, she got nearer. After some interaction with the kids, Lisa asked if Sabrina and I would like to go for a walk with her. She brought us around her village. Along the way, many other kids followed and they plucked a lot of beautiful flowers for the both of us.

### **Their Shelters, Their Homes**

As you can see in the pictures below, their homes are mainly made of wood and straws. When we visited the houses, we found them rather small and cramped. Each house had only a small living room and a small bedroom where the whole family had to cram together.



Most families had their own farms. They owned fields to plant crops, buffaloes to help in the field, chickens and ducks to support themselves.



### **The Ministries - Nonghan**

The Nonghan church is quite well established. It started off as a church without walls but, by faith, they managed to accomplish their building project, with support from Bedok Lutheran Church.



### Immanuel Youth Hostel

Immanuel Youth Hostel was set up by the Norwegians. To date, the main support for the hostel still comes from them.

There are about 30 youths in this hostel aged between 13 to 18 years old. The hostel caters to students with financial difficulties and whose homes are located very far away from the school. Applications for admission are subject to approval by Kal, who is the in charge of the hostel. When a student is accepted into the hostel, his/her parents would contribute a sack of rice to the hostel.



Kal mentioned the need of having a male counselor to be a role model for the boys as she had seen some of them gamble and even take drugs. Things are currently under control.

It has been a requirement for every hostel to have a separate building for the boys and girls. Though they do not have the funds, Kal intends to put up another building for the boys by faith. She knows that God will supply all their needs.

Students are to obey the rules set by the hostel and they have to pass all their exams. They are assigned daily chores. When they are free, they make cross-stitch cards or play instruments to earn their pocket money. Part of the money will go to the hostel to support them.

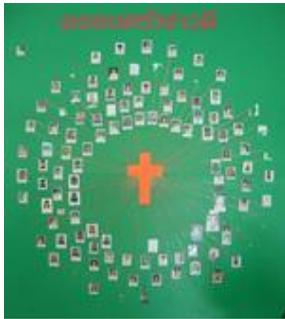
### Phibun church

We visited the church for service on a Sunday. It's about a kilometre away from the youth hostel. Shoes were not allowed into the Sanctuary. It has approximately 150 members.

Birds tend to make their homes in the spaces under the wooden roof. There used to be a lot of bird-droppings on the floor and it was rather hard to tidy up. They do not have the money to build a proper roof but by faith they are going to build one soon. Meanwhile, they use some temporary measures to keep the birds away.

### Ubon Good news church

Another church located at Phibun. It has approximately 200 over members. Many of them stay far away from the church and, as farmers, do not have enough money for transport. Hence, they normally wake up early and walk to church.



The vision of the pastor is to see the entire village getting to know Christ. As I walked around the church, I saw the photos of church members arranged around a cross in the centre (picture on left). It signifies a family in Christ and it stirs my heart with a warm feeling.

Palanchai school

This was one of the highlights of our trip. Though we had only a day with the kids, all of us experienced a lot on this day. It was the only non-Christian community that we ministered to throughout the whole trip. We were told that no direct evangelism was allowed. Despite the restriction, we did all that we could in the name of the Lord.

It was the school's annual English Camp. The Norwegian undergrads were there to teach English to the kids. Our team was there to play with them the whole day and that in turn helped us to build a bridge of friendship with them. They were immensely happy with our presence and so they asked us to promise them that we would return next year.



We played games and taught them English songs in the morning as they were split into groups to rotate around for different activities. After lunch, the students had a choice of preferred activities. We taught one of the groups our youths' PULSE dance.

After they learned, they were supposed to perform in the evening.

After the dance 'workshop', the teachers invited the Norwegians and our team to join them for a friendly

volleyball and soccer match. I had not played any of these ball games since graduating from my secondary school. Not knowing the rules, I just went along. Though we lost both games, we won the hearts of the people.



After dinner, the students put up wonderful performances. We put up a skit on 'Hands', 2 song items as well as having John share a short message with them. Though we could not have an altar call, but we knew that the message was delivered and the students heard it. The night ended with a mass dance, but it was just the beginning ...

### Nan - Baan Nabong Village & Baan Den village



These two villages are located at the mountain top of North Thailand. The majestic mountains, the beautiful flowers and green pastures, the adorable buffaloes and goats, the fresh air, the bright shining stars, the helpful and hospitable people are things that I

never get to experience in Singapore.

We visited the churches and the homes of some members during our two days of stay in Nan. Each church had close to 200 over members.

The structure of both the Church buildings in Baan Nabong and Baan Den have roofs supported by wooden pillars. There was no electricity; no lights at all at night. In our trek back to our campsite after a night gathering, we depended on our weak torchlights to illuminate the path before us with the help of a local who was familiar with the way. I am reminded of our Christian walk. Many times we do not know what is going to happen, but we do know where we are heading because God's light brightens the way to the destination.

Both the villages have almost 95% of the families belonging to God. Only about one to two new families have not received Christ. Many of them used to be Buddhists and believe in spirits, but often their gods could not help them. Finally, they experienced Jesus Christ –



His power, His healings, His blessings – and now they are children of the true God! Praise be to God!

Ah Chan Thawee is the evangelist in Ban Nabong. He has been there since mid-2004. The church holds service on Sunday morning and cell group prayer in the members' homes after lunch. There are villagers, young or old, from another village (about 10km away) who walk to the church. Daily, there will be people joining him for early morning prayers and evening worship sessions. Many of them had truly experienced God themselves. Children crying non-stop throughout the night would be brought to him in the middle of the night. Some used to seek mediums whenever they faced problems and the mediums usually said that the spirits wanted them to offer this and that to them first. The poor villagers would in turn have to spend a lot on the offerings for the spirits. Some had lots of illnesses and were healed by their faith in Jesus.

As most of the villagers are very poor, they do not own a vehicle. Whenever the sick needs to be sent to the hospital, they will have to walk kilometres down the hill. In the past, some had died along their way. Most drivers do not want to pick up these people as they are afraid they might die in their vehicle, and they felt that the hospitals are not quite interested in these 'dying' people.

*To be continued in the Feb issue of The Vine*

Angeline You

14 January 2006

# Cell Group Launch 2006

## Cell Study Launch

- Emphasis on cell life – caring and exemplifying Body Life
- Introduction to Study Material and how it relates to Discipleship
- Building of Foundational Disciplines
- Covenanting to be part of Cell - role and commitment



# **'Tis the Season of Giving** **& Receiving**

December 25<sup>th</sup> is already past, or is it? No, December 25<sup>th</sup> 2006 is yet to arrive. Anyway, my thoughts are on **the season of giving & receiving**, which is a longer season than Christmas *per se*.

The profit-making people of commerce who invariably cherishes a **season of giving** will not begrudge me in saying that Christmas may come and go, but every time can always be time to celebrate as **the season**. Don't you agree? After December comes January which is a time of coincidence for the New Year and for bonuses to be encashed by all ye people who have toiled a whole year in your jobs. Isn't it a great occasion to celebrate, with giving coming on naturally in the spirit of joy and celebration of a small or big windfall? Guaranteed, the festive mood in all commercial thoroughfares will not abate with another season of the New Year bidding farewell, for yet another will come and take its place – The Chinese New Year. After that, of course, Valentine Day will dawn to lift the spirits or hopes of those whose ears are always transfixed by every ring of the cash register. Woe betides those who are too busy to remember the Day of giving to win the hearts of their dearest. Will they ever have any excuse to forget, with all the publicity in the media and on the shopping streets reminding them that 'tis the season of giving for them to flash their credit/debit cards? ☺

Perhaps there will be a short break for the interested parties, and then the calls of the season will rise again. It is up to the creativity of people to assign the season to any day or period. Why not simply let the whole year and every year be the Season of Giving?

The Bible teaches us that it is more blessed to give than to receive. Yet, if everybody intends to give in order to be more blessed, and no one wants to be a recipient to be less blessed, the result is that there will be no giving and no receiving, and no blessing to go round. Thinking of my recent mission trip to Thailand, I have to be thankful to God for giving me the opportunity to be blessed in giving away some used items – a fine pair of jeans (except for some mud stains that could be easily washed away), a pair of sandals in good condition (actually the property of Anthony which he let me use and had no need of it back), a pair of tailored trousers, some shirts, etc. I didn't have to dig into my pocket to give, but how delighted were the recipients of the gifts. The recipients of the sandals and the jeans even showed them off cheerfully. It was very obvious that they felt blessed to receive the simple gifts of used items, but greater was my feeling of being blessed to be the giver.

Can we duplicate the right spirit of giving and receiving without all the commercial hypes and some foolish idea that the more expensive a gift (in terms of money spent to purchase it

brand new) the more valuable it is? Frequently, people buy expensive gifts just to impress, or for a business motive to induce a return. (Hypocrisy?) On the other hand, I have received gifts of used clothes, books, school shoes and other items in good condition; and I appreciate the givers and the opportunities to put the items to good use and hence reduce wastage and save the Earth. I on my own have given away a surplus computer in my house to someone who in turn gave it away where it could be put to better use. I have given away a Palm (which had outlived its usefulness to me – better off letting someone extend its useful life than to dump it). I have also given away used books, and many more other simple inexpensive stuffs including both those with commercial value (if sold to the *karang guni* man) and those without commercial value, but with very much remaining utility value. I give as well as I take used items from people. In taking, I always tell the giver that if there is anybody who would benefit more from the items, then give it to him/her, but I will take them if I have use for them and no one else wants them. Some used books I take because the giver offered to others who declined because their children preferred new books. Rather than throw the used books away, why not I use them for my children, save some money to buy other things needed, or accept them and in turn give away to people who need them more and don't mind the dog-ears?

It is more blessed to give than to receive. We are all encouraged to give. Let it be an all-year-round affair to maximize the useful life of things we buy and dispose of. How many people simply believe in throwing away useful things instead of recycling them by offering to others? Could it be because it is too much trouble to give? Or is it because people who can make use of the secondhand items are simply too shy to say so, or pride gets the better of them that they only want new goods? I find it very shameful of people to litter the void decks with very useful items (including current textbooks) that nobody wanted or the owner did not want to offer to others for fear of being accused of condescension.

Every day is the season of giving. The spirit of giving without monetary consideration should have its counterpart – the spirit of receiving, for there can be no giving if there is nobody who wants to receive. In the church, I believe that most of us have opportunities to give and receive, cut wastage as good Christian stewards of things that God has blessed us with. There is nothing wrong to give or receive brand new items nicely wrapped up, but it would be very wrong if we stop at this practice and not extend the opportunity of giving to those who want to enjoy the greater blessings as givers but are not always able to give newly purchased items. They may have used school uniforms and shoes that are in wearable conditions, used textbooks and

assessment books with only one or two pages used, etc. Are these items better off being thrown away or sold to *karang guni* men as scraps when, even if you don't have children who need them, you may have friends, neighbours or relatives whom you know can be helped to save unnecessary expenditure. Is anybody in need but is too conscious of face? **Is there any Christian in JCC who is not yet tied down with any ministry involvement and would like to take upon himself/herself this ministry of being the coordinator for all the useful exchanges in the spirit of extolling good stewardship of things God has blessed us with?** Children of God ought to be ever willing to give and receive, not for monetary or supercilious considerations, but in the right spirit of good stewardship.

Giving can also extend to services in little ways, with little touches of love. For example, if you are a doctor, you can give of your best in honouring the Hippocratic Oath. If you are a teacher, you may offer a bit more patience to help the slow-learners among your pupils. If you are serving customers in a coffeeshop and someone asks for half a glass of plain water to take some tablets, you can offer it obligingly instead of coming back with one full glass and barking, "20 cents!" When I look at the society at large, I have been both dismayed and encouraged by the two kinds of scenes playing in front of my eyes – one scene speaks loud and clear "No Money No Talk" and in this

scene I see self-centred people rushing in all directions busy with their pursuits of wealth regardless of the interest of others; while in the other scene I see humble people, whether rich or poor, who are a picture of graciousness and modesty. In society, a lower proportion of well-heeled people with showy displays of their wealth are not too busy with their self-aggrandizing pursuits to have any time to care for the underprivileged; yet a much higher proportion of those less-endowed with material riches are busying themselves reaching out with a charitable heart. Call it the mother of all paradoxes!

"'Tis the Season of Giving" can be a hypocritical call of the commercial world exemplified by a Santa Claus walking down Orchard Road with a bag of goodies in hand; but when a few children rush forward with innocent hope of getting a handout, what they receive is a brush-off by the hand of the one who has somehow lost his trademark 'Ho ... Ho ... Ho ...' genial laughter.

"'tis the Season of Giving" can also be a genuine feeling in our heart for every day of the year in response to the blessing promised us in Scripture. Implied in Acts 20:35 is that there is blessedness still in receiving although it is more blessed to give. So by extending our receiving hand with pleasure to those who only have humble gifts to offer sans fine wrapping paper, we are in fact giving them the advantage of receiving the

greater blessings of giving. If we do both giving and receiving, it is logical that the blessings upon us should be manifold. By being careful givers (without extravagance) and thoughtful receivers (without demanding extravagance on the part of the givers), we would be addressing in a meaningful way the ills of materialism that have seeped into every nook and corner of society, the Church not spared. Personally and practically, we can save much money from some consumption (while saving the Earth as well) and have more to give to the Church in tithes and offerings. You may be surprised that you end up having more than what you can use to meet your needs.

In the Season of Giving all-year-round, may God also bless you with the spirit of giving in service to the Church. Dr O. S. Hawkins, a US Baptist pastor wrote, “The principal hindrance to the advancement of the kingdom of God is greed. It is the chief obstacle to heaven-sent revival. It seems that when the back of greed is broken, the human spirit soars into regions of unselfishness.” I understand this not just in terms of financial giving, but also in terms of rendering to God the gifts of talents that He first gives us. We have received, and thus blessed to give in His service, not to withhold out of greed to have every talent to ourselves for our own use and benefits. We are not to ignore the manifold blessings that our talents can generate in the lives of our brothers and sisters

in the church. I think this Chinese expression 有钱出钱、有力出力 conveys my thoughts more aptly than the English expression “*Give in cash or kind*”. A direct translation of the Chinese expression is an encouragement to people to render financial support if they have the resources, and to offer support by their non-monetary efforts if they have the abilities. It is very good if children of God are blessed with both finances and talents to contribute to the growth of the Church. In contrast, it would be very woeful if God blesses any of His children with neither; and I certainly wish that no one is in that plight.

2006 is a special year. Every year is a special year, because we can always make it special if we think it isn't. Why not make this year special by virtue of our special resolution to make the season of giving and receiving come alive in an enterprisingly non-commercial way? Brothers and sisters in the Lord can start the habit of giving what they can spare to help someone save money and they can also be humble enough to receive what they possibly can put to use to save themselves some money. With more savings from the blessed habit, I believe our opportunities to give will multiply. Of course, we can make full application of the opportunities or just let them rot away. The Bible says, “Do to others as you would have them do to you” (Lk 6:31), right? So we want others to accept our gifts to give us the blessedness of giving, likewise we

accept their gifts to enable them to enjoy the same blessedness.

The Bible also says, “Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.” (Lk 6:38) We give. God gives us back in various ways, possibly as a direct produce of our efforts or via the giving hands of His humble people, for blessed are they who are meek that they are thus enabled with blessings to share – yet, many reject the blessings that God intends for them. This is the same with our spirit of servanthood in rendering our talents for gain to the Kingdom. When we teach others in Sunday School (giving), we learn in the process of exchange of thoughts with the learners (receiving). As a greenhorn team treasurer for the recent Thailand mission trip with zero accounting background, I took the plunge into the pile of receipts and numbers and in the process picked up a lot of tips from a more qualified treasurer (Martin Cheah) about the subject of accounting, in addition to new skills I developed in the use of Excel through trial and error and the assistance of the HELP menu. If you “can spare the time” to write regularly for the Vine (giving by way of sharing your blessings with readers), you will gradually hone your writing skill. ☺ ☺ If you have the abilities to make lives great for the boys and girls in the Boys’ Brigade and Girls’ Brigade, you may derive much more

from your immersion with the teenagers. If you don’t have money (没钱), you still can contribute service to the Lord (有力) in any of the many departments of the church. Nobody is there to force you; it has to be your free will.

Please note that the preceding statements I make are partly tongue-in-cheek, not meant to encourage readers to start calculating (打算盘) what there is to gain for every unit of effort given. If we render service with that kind of calculating spirit, it becomes counter-productive. People around us may not know the calculations in our minds, but God knows and He will dispense blessings according to who He thinks deserve. Despite what Cain thought as a better offering to God that ought to be accepted, it was rejected in favour of what his brother Abel offered. Why? Because Abel offered by faith, and thus his offering was better and he was commended a righteous man. (Heb 11:4) Likewise, Abraham obeyed God by faith, and God provided a far better sacrifice as Abraham knew by faith that God would. (Gen 22:8) And to this day it is said, “On the mountain of the LORD it will be provided.” (Gen 22:14) Is there anyone who doubts that when we give by faith, God will give back something better? Matt. 25:29 tells us that “everyone who has [talents] will be given more, and he will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken from him.” **Do you have?**

Two paragraphs above, I said that God gives us back in various ways, possibly as a direct produce of our efforts or via the giving hands of His humble people. In fact, there is another more potent way in which God blesses us for our giving **by faith**. I emphasise the two words “by faith” because I don’t want anyone to fall into the same trap of misconstruction about giving as Cain did to his peril. When we give by faith, in love as God teaches us, God blesses us through a lot of avenues that we often fail to find the direct humanly perceivable connections with our pathways of giving in cash or service – better still, in both. I think all Christians have both. Don’t tell me you

don’t have enough finances. (Not even a copper coin?) Don’t tell me you don’t have any talent, by the counsel of Matt. 25:29. (Who can ever survive in life without even the littlest of talents?) It is high time we depart from commercialese and make the year (the whole year) truly **the season of giving** by faith and in love as God first loved us, and make it **the season of receiving** as, by God’s grace, blessings are poured into our lap.

Wishing all a fruitful and fulfilling 2006.

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# SIF

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Various leaders including the Pulse, BB and GB shared their ministries and their needs for 2006

