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BIBLICAL FOUNDATION FOR MUSIC IN THE CHRISTIAN WORSHIP OF TODAY

Music has a powerful effect on human experience. Students of religious phenomena have long recognized that music transcends our understanding and appeals to our intuitive nature. In Singapore Bible College we have to spend a few semesters studying church music and have to sing in the choir every Thursday afternoon. At first we wonder why we need to do that but later realize its importance in worship. We should thank God for the many brothers and sisters who sacrifice their time and effort to practise in the evenings and after service for this ministry. The worship music and choir ministry in JCC plays a very important role in worship. It is not surprising, since music also played an important part in the worship of biblical communities, as a way of approaching the mystery of God and of expressing the joy of his presence. This article discusses the role of music in the worship of Israel and of the early church, by way of establishing a biblical foundation for music in the Christian worship of today.

Mission & Evangelism Month
I Will Serve You, LORD!

Music in Israelite Worship

Some Israelite prophets were musicians. During the exodus Miriam the prophetess, taking her tambourine, led the women in song and dance, celebrating the Lord's triumph over the Egyptians (Exod. 15:20-21). Saul encountered a band of sanctuary prophets who prophesied accompanied by instruments (1 Sam. 10:5). Isaiah composed songs, including one celebrating the Lord's deliverance of those who trust in him (Isa. 26:1-6). The public regarded Ezekiel as "one who has a beautiful voice and plays well on an instrument" (33:32).

David, a musician as well as a warrior, established the place of music in the worship of the Lord. Even before the sacrifices had been moved to Jerusalem, he instructed the Levitical musicians to celebrate the ark's journey to Zion (1 Chron. 15:16-24), and appointed Asaph as chief musician in charge of continual thanksgiving and praise (1 Chron. 16:1-7). The description of this activity (1 Chron. 25:1-7) suggests that these musicians led in a spontaneous and overwhelming outpouring of worship, especially at high moments like the dedication of Solomon's temple (2 Chron 5:11-14). This may be the "new song" to which the Psalms refer (33:3, 40:3, 96:1, 144:9, 149:1). Many Psalms perhaps originated in this pre-temple Davidic worship centering around the Ark of the Covenant.



In the temple, music functioned as a "sacrifice of praise," an offering of song to accompany the offering of sacrifice. Under the Judean rulers, the performance of music became regulated and standardized. The titles of 55 Psalms refer to the music director, with instructions for performance on various instruments or using certain tunes. This psalmody remained a feature of Israelite and Jewish worship. After the exile, Ezra recruited more than 200 Levites for service in the sanctuary (Ezra 8:18-20). First-century Jewish sources indicate that the choir of Herod's temple consisted of at least twelve adult male singers, with no upper limit. Singers served between

the ages of thirty and fifty, after a five-year training period. The sources also describe the instruments in use at that time.

After the Babylonian exile, most Jews lived in the Dispersion (areas

outside of Palestine) and could not participate in temple worship. Therefore the synagogue arose for prayer and the study of the Scriptures. (There is a Jewish synagogue right here at Waterloo Street in Singapore). The Psalms continued to be sung, and other portions of the Scriptures as well as prayers were chanted according to a developing system of "modes." Such Jewish music influenced the worship of the early church.

Israelite worship music was both vocal and instrumental; the sanctuary orchestra contributed to the celebration of Israel's covenant with the Lord. Its instruments fall into the same general classes with which we are familiar—percussion, winds (pipes) and strings. Horns, trumpets, cymbals, harps and lyres were used when the ark was brought to Mount Zion, and their continued use is reflected in their mention in the Psalms. Some of these musical instruments were displayed at the Singapore Philatelic Museum last year when there was also an exhibition of Israeli stamps. The sanctuary instruments were not solo instruments, but sounded simultaneously to call the assembly to worship (Ps 98:6). Strings and pipes, if used, probably played the modalities (tune elements) in the psalm being sung, with perhaps distinctive patterns of ornamentation. Horns, trumpets and cymbals added to the festive joy by creating a larger sound. The *selah* of the Psalms may have been an instrumental interlude, or a "lifting up" of sound by both singers and instrumentalists. Tambourines, usually played by women, are mentioned in connection with dancing at Israelite festivals (Psa. 68:25), but were not used in the sanctuary where only men served as priests and musicians.



What did the music of Israel's worship sound like? While we cannot know today exactly how it sounded, recent research has confirmed the similarity between Hebraic music and ancient forms of Christian chant. Biblical music incorporated several characteristic features:

- *Monophony*, the use of an unharmonized melodic line—although ornamentation and instrumental accompaniment could create a primitive form of harmony.
- *Modality* refers to the use of various musical motifs within a certain scale, each with its own function.

o *Ornamentation*, the use of enhancements suited to the skill of the performer.

o *Rhythm*—Semitic music does not use the regular beat of modern Western music but has a more complex pattern of time structuring.

o *Scale*—Semitic music follows a generally diatonic melody, but with some use of quartertone intervals as well as whole or half tones.

o *Improvisation*, the practice of composing the music in the process of performing it using skills acquired through a long period of training.

o *Antiphony*—In antiphonal music, groups of performers answer one another in statement and response. Examples in biblical worship may be found in the Psalms (Psa. 24, 118) and the "Holy, holy, holy" of Isaiah's seraphim (Isa. 6:3), in a vision no doubt influenced in its expression by the chanting of priestly choirs. This last feature suggests that the congregation, as well as trained musicians, may have been involved in the musical responses of the service.



Worship Music in the New Testament

The worship of the emerging Christian movement did not produce new forms of music, but shared the characteristics described above, many of which are still found in the music of historic liturgies. Clearly, the worship life of the early church included psalms and other forms of song.

The New Testament mentions worship music in several places. The gospel story begins with a hymn of praise on the lips of the heavenly host, "Glory to God in the highest" (Luke 2:14). Reading the lesson from Isaiah in the synagogue of Nazareth (Luke 4:16-20), Jesus probably intoned it according to the custom of the time. The Gospels record that Jesus and his disciples sang a hymn after the Last Supper (Matt. 26:30; Mark 14:26), probably the "Great Hallel" (Psalms 113-118) of the Passover tradition. Luke records that Paul and Silas were singing hymns in prison at Philippi when an earthquake occurred (Acts 16:25). Paul urges the Christians of Ephesus and Colossae to give thanks to

God in "psalms and hymns and spiritual songs" (Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16). Describing the assembly of the church of Corinth, he remarks that "everyone has a psalm" (1 Cor. 14:26) which must blend with the contributions of other worshipers in an orderly service. Perhaps "psalms" were the biblical psalms, while "hymns" could have been Christian music in praise of Christ; and "spiritual songs", more spontaneous worship expressions.

Luke quotes several hymns in the beginning chapters of his Gospel. In addition to the *Gloria in Excelsis* mentioned above, he includes the *Magnificat* or Song of Mary (1:46-55), the *Benedictus* or Song of Zechariah (1:67-79) and the *Nunc Dimittis* or Song of Simeon (2:29-32). Although spoken by several figures in the story of Jesus' birth, these hymns came to be used in Christian worship at an early period. Paul quotes what may have been another song, "Awake, O sleeper," in Eph. 5:14. Scholars have suggested that other passages in Paul's letters are based on primitive Christian hymns in praise of Christ, such as Philippians 2:6-11, Colossians 1:15-20 and 1 Timothy 3:16. Such hymns may have been composed to reinforce Christian teaching about the nature of Jesus' Messiahship. The *Hosanna* hymn of the crowds at Jesus' entry into Jerusalem (Mark 11:9, based on Psa. 118:26) became part of the historic Christian Eucharistic celebration.

Musical expression of Christian worship reaches its New Testament climax in the hymns of the Revelation to John. In John's vision, acts of praise before God's throne accompany the dramatic unfolding of events on earth. These hymns glorify the Creator (4:11), proclaim the worth of the Lamb (5:9-10; 5:12), extol both the Father and the Son (5:13; 7:10; 7:12), celebrate God's triumph over the enemies of his people (11:16; 11:17-18; 12:10-12; 19:1-3; 19:6-8), and proclaim his justice (15:3-4; 16:5-7). Additional songs celebrate the defeat of the unfaithful city, persecutor of the saints (chapter 18). This pageant of praise is initiated by four living creatures drawn from the vision of Ezekiel, singing words derived from Isaiah's vision in the temple (Rev. 4:8). It expands to include the elders of the covenant people, the hosts of heaven, and eventually every creature. Perhaps these hymns reflect the actual worship practice of the church near the end of the first century. If so, the Revelation offers a window not only into the judgments of God in the earth but also into the development of Christian liturgy and hymnody.

The New Testament does not supply enough detail to reconstruct the exact musical content of developing Christian worship. We should avoid the temptation to project the practices of later centuries back into Bible times. One question is the degree to which Israelite musical practices, including the use of

instruments, offer a due to what was thought appropriate in the New Testament church. Since the Hebrew Scriptures were still the authority for teaching and practice (1 Tim. 3:16-17), their broad principles regarding music must have remained the norm. The young church was a community under persecution, and could not apply the full resources of biblical celebration to its worship assemblies. Nevertheless, the evidence shows that music played a vital role in the worship of the emerging Christian community.

Let us learn to appreciate church music and glorify God in worship and adoration through it. Amen.

Pastor Martin Yee

Growing The Church

John Lee

Is Church growth merely an option? If it were, then there is no need for anyone to feel burdened about our church's lack of growth, its stagnancy or retrogression. No matter which way you attempt to visualize the truth, the truth staring in your face is that time is running short for us to move into the 21st Century, and we are yet to be spiritually strong enough to move into the battlefield in force to save lives for the Lord's Kingdom.

I attended the English Council Prayers and Workshop 2000 on 14th and 15th July not as a councillor, but as a representative of The Vine, and I was tasked to communicate with members of the congregation the salient issues that transpired in the Workshop discussions so that all can be taken on board the ship on its voyage in fresh directions to chart a path of progress for the church.

At the invitation, I thought that it would just be another run-of-the-mill kind of thing with "church growth" heavy on lips but light in the belly and heart. I was proven wrong. As I soaked in the discussions, the burden of the Council for its vision and mission was manifest. It was not just talking around a table with no

real action; action was already seen by way of the Council Chairman's single-minded objectivity and his no-nonsense style in analyzing the issues, peeling away the flesh and going deep into the bones. There was a palpable sense of healthy stress on everyone at the rectangular table, including myself as a worker in the Vineyard, and not excluding the Chairman himself whose passion in arguing for a concerted dedication by councillors to the mission ahead was not lost on anybody. Leaving the Prayers and Workshop at the end, I was glad that unity among Councillors prevailed – The Chairman's heart was with the Council as God's agent for positive change in the church and all "Councilmen" (as the Chairman would address the Councillors) shared the same vision and mission with their God-appointed human leader to be diligent and focused in playing a coordinated role according to their individual assignments.

Accountability of one to another was stressed and accepted, and this sense of accountability must filter down to the "leaders of five, leaders of ten, leaders of twenty..." in the congregation. A calling to be in a particular position in the church hierarchy is a calling to serve with dedication, not just a calling to wear a badge of social standing. Moreover, any individual's sense of calling to a particular ministry should be substantiated by awareness of his giftedness and ability to wrest some gain for the Kingdom instead of just dependent on personal enthusiasm for the work involved. It is not productive for the church if we have servants wearing multiple hats enthusiastically but serving in all the wrong areas when they can function most effectively by concentrating their energy in a limited area where their talents stand out and they can perform with distinction. (Check your gift at http://www.elmertowns.com/content/spiritual_gifts_test/spiritual_gifts_questionnaire.html) Lay leadership assignment is therefore going to be essentially a responsibility of the Council and not left to function under "auto-pilot".

The church administration is being strengthened and the responsibilities of Councillors clearly underlined in a freshly drawn up organization structure. Change is definitely in the air. Just regarding The Vine, you will not only read of it but also feel it in this issue. Church-wide, changes are in the offing as the Council focuses attention on Worship, Care Groups, Visitations and Youth ministry for the rest of the year, including a revamp of the corporate Prayer and Praise. Emphasis on participation in a Care Group will be emphasised in catechism classes. Reshuffling of workers in the field of service will be carried

Parable of the Prodigal Son – RETOLD

On Saturday afternoon, 15th Jul 2000, I had the privilege to hear a most moving and gripping message at JCC sanctuary. The message was based on the Parable of the Prodigal Son (Luke 24: 11 – 32). Reverend Jossy Chacko eloquently expounded other less obvious but powerful lessons from this very familiar parable. I was stunned by some of the slightly alien perspectives that Reverend Jossy shared. But, there is no escaping the beautiful and Godly truths behind his views.

He said that God is not really happy when we come together in church to offer praises and worship. He also implied that fellowship amongst fellow Christians is unnecessary. We Christians are too preoccupied with ourselves – “Me-ism”. Uncomfortable with these statements? I was.

Although Reverend Jossy did not say it, I think if he had to change the title of the parable, he would have named it as “Parable of A Hurting Father Who Has Lost His Son.” The emphasis of the parable is on the father, not on the son as most of us would say. Re-visit the parable with these roles in mind. The father is our dear Father in heaven. The lost son represents all unsaved souls. The older son refers to us fellow Christians.

The parable says that the father saw the lost son coming back “while he (the son)

was still a long way off”. He must have been anxiously looking out for him. He was not just going about his daily chores happily. He had his son on his mind and was longing for his return. This is how it is with our Father in heaven. He yearns to see every single one of His children come back to Him. If ANY one remains lost, He will not rest.

“... he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him.” Imagine the stench as the father embraced him! The son had been living with pigs! But the father couldn't care two hoots how he smelled. The sight of his son's homecoming was heavenly fragrance. So it is with all lost souls. No matter what wrong one has committed, our Father in heaven awaits eagerly with open arms for those who come back to Him in humble repentance. “Quick! Bring the best robe and put in on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet”. The father had all these ready and waiting for the son! That's how much he has been yearning to have the son back. He called for a celebration and great rejoicing. Yes, that's how pleased God will be each time a lost soul is saved.

But the older brother was not too happy. “All these years I've been slaving for you and never disobeyed your orders. Yet you never gave me even a young goat so I could celebrate with my friends.” And so on, he complained against the father's fussing over the useless son who squandered his hard-earned money. Reverend Jossy likened us saved Christians to this older son. There is a

tendency to become complacent as we are not in need; we are comfortable. There is a trend towards asking God for help with our own needs.

How does the father answer the older son? He says, "you are always with me, and everything I have is yours." Yes, we need a strong reminder that WE ARE SAVED! We are already part of His heavenly family. This is reason enough for rejoice. But the father is in a jubilant mood because of the younger son's homecoming. So it is with our Father in Heaven. Heaven is a wonderful place as it is. But when a lost soul is found, there is great rejoicing! This is what really pleases our Father in Heaven.

Yes, we need fellowship; we need to praise God. However Reverend Jossy stated plainly that all these take second place to our duty to reap the harvest for the glory of His Kingdom. We have all of eternity to sing praises and fellowship when we meet in Heaven. The time and effort spent NOW on earth can make an eternal difference to someone whom we reach out to.

God has placed us exactly where He wants us to be. We must take on the role as labourers to reap the plentiful harvest right in front of us at our home, school, place of work, wherever....

I reexamined my usual excuses for not sharing the gospel: For example, not knowing what to say, not knowing the Bible well enough, not having the time, not knowing how the other person will

feel, etc. Suddenly, these sounded shamefully hollow, especially when Reverend Jossy related the true story about a Chinese Singaporean woman he had just brought to accept Christ. The woman said to a Christian friend after accepting Jesus Christ, "I've known you for 20 years; how come you never told me about Jesus?" Can you hear those words being flung at you also? Maybe by a close colleague or sibling on Judgement Day?

Goh Young Kwang

Editor's comments

Jossy was born in the state of Kerala, South India. He migrated to Western Australia in 1988 with only his Bible and twenty dollars. However, God blessed him and he was able to retire at a young age of 30 to dedicate his life to spreading the Good News.

He told about his first experience in sharing the Gospel in Northern India. He spoke to a young man and shared about Christ. The people there had never heard of Christ before. The young man became angry and Jossy was taken aback. He asked why the young man was so angry to hear the good news? The young man replied that if Jossy believed that Jesus was the only way, then he was 3 months late in bringing this message because the young man's father passed away 3 months ago. This incident was the driving force for Jossy to bring the good news to India.

When Jossy gave the invitation to commit ourselves to the work of missions, 80% of those who attended stood up. Jossy and his wife Jenni have established an organisation called Compassion For India Inc. You can reach them at e-mail: compassionforindia@imb.net or you can surf their site: www.compassionforindia.org



The MISSION & EVANGELISM VINE

Dear brothers and sisters
in Christ,

Greetings in the precious
name of our Lord Jesus
Christ.

While preparing for the
recent trip to Indonesia,

many of you came to me and expressed your concern for my safety. The country's racial and religious problems had been unpredictable. However, my main concern was the long and tedious journey to the destination – by air, land and sea.

Throughout the team's journey, I prayed and prayed to our Lord. My continuous prayer was a sign of my helplessness and need for His mercy. On our return trip, sailing in a wooden vessel with about 100 people on board, we ran into a thunderstorm somewhere in the Indian Ocean. At about midnight one of my team members woke me up because of seasickness and fear. A few minutes later I heard a loud crashing sound. I immediately poked my head out of the porthole (window), only to witness our wooden vessel splitting a fishing vessel into two pieces. As the front portion of the fishing vessel drifted by my very eyes, I heard continuous cries of "Tolong, tolong ... saya tidak mahu mati" ("Help, help ... I do not want to die.") fading into the wet, cold and dark night.

The impact caused a temporary power failure on board our vessel. Some passengers were crying and there was confusion. A creepy thought made me feel even colder. Did the collision cause any damage to the boat? I went to the Lord in prayer. Then I felt that the ship was listing. Again, I went to the Lord in prayer.

Later, electrical power was restored. For one hour we combed a wide area in the open sea and eventually rescued all the four fishermen, the youngest being only seventeen years old. Equipped with our first aid kit, the mission team dressed the wounds of a survivor and gave all the four fishermen dry clothes. I thanked the Lord.

Just like many would do, I asked silently why the incident had to happen.

For the rest of the journey, the survivors and some other passengers gathered outside my cabin and the whole incident was being repeated for hours with a mixture of laughter, tears and anger. Since I had no opportunity to rest my tired eyes, I listened to their conversations.

In the midst of it all, I heard the name of our Lord being mentioned and then testimonies of His grace. One of the fishermen was a nominal Christian and he shared that when he was thrown into the water, he called upon the Lord for mercy. He also confessed that previously he had wished for the other three, who were of a different faith, to be punished for their cruelty towards him. Nevertheless, when all four were in the water, he rescued them who were trapped in the already submerged fishing boat. One of the mission team members took this opportunity to emphasise the grace of our Lord and on that night the gospel was preached to a group of Muslims, Buddhist and nominal Christians. The fisherman had first-hand experience of answered prayers.

So, after all, there was a purpose for the accident to happen!

Many of us may be in the midst of a storm or may know of others who are in the storm and ask why? Well, the Good Shepherd has laid down His life for His sheep, and we can be assured that He is always there to fish us out of stormy waters when we call upon Him.

Pastor Michael Christian

SIGNIFICANCE OF A SHORT MISSION TRIP

By Pastor Michael Christian

Even though with the discomforting thought of not having proper accommodation or proper sanitation, mission trips have always opened my eyes to the vast task of evangelism. One of the tools, which I have come to see of importance in Missions, is just being there and giving encouragement to the missionaries and the national Christian workers.

Throughout the recent trip to Thailand, our missionary Rev Terry Kee interpreted for us and also gave us a deep understanding of the work at Udon Thani. Being Singaporeans in Thailand, our presence must have brought home closer to him. When we left Bangkok and after the good-byes, I took a good look at Rev Terry only to see his smile and excitement depart from his face.

In the mission fields, our prayers, testimonies for Christ Jesus and visitations to the people's homes gave a signal that others do care. The family of Christ stretches far and wide. Even though language was a barrier to communication, I am delighted of the trip and hope to visit our Thai brothers and sisters in Christ again.

I AM NOT ASHAMED OF THE GOSPEL

Romans 1:16 (NIV)

I am not ashamed of the GOSPEL, because it is the POWER OF GOD for the SALVATION of everyone who BELIEVES: First for the Jew, then for the Gentiles.

Verse 17

For in the GOSPEL RIGHTEOUSNESS from GOD is revealed, a righteousness that is by FAITH from FIRST to LAST, just as it is written "The righteous will live by FAITH."

I count it a privilege to be able to go for the recent mission exposure trip. PRIVILEGE because:

- 1 No obstacle : - Michelle was able to care for our children and chauffeur them to and fro from school and tuition, and go for her GB programs as well; BB programs were all being taken care by dedicated officers (who also have their own family commitments); God has made it possible;
- 2 Experience 1st hand what God is doing in another part of the world;
- 3 An opportunity is given to share Jesus Christ with a group of people who may not have much freedom to hear the Gospel.

Those were my thoughts and planning prior to the mission exposure trip. Praise God! I was humbled. God had a better and bigger plan for me.

During the four-day trip God showed me what Romans 1: 16 means and made it real to me. I was baptized with this verse. God showed me: "not ashamed of the Gospel – it is the Power of God for Salvation of everyone who believes".

For this, I have to thank God for the Christian brothers and sisters at Udon Thani's preaching station. They are simple folks who live simply and have just enough for their daily consumption. WOW! They have abundance to offer. Most of them are small-time farmers – having less than an acre of land to plant paddy. They have a simple 1-room house; no condominium; no 5-room, 4-room, 3-room or 2-room flat. They have a ground floor, where the kitchen, bath/toilet and dining room are located. They do their cooking with a simple gas stove, drawing water from the well. Their hospitality is superb - they offer from out of the abundance of their heart - From sleeping comfort to food, they provide the best with the little they have.

MISSION TRIP TO THAILAND

"The little they have - they give their best" It is also very evident in their faith in Jesus Christ. They shared their testimony with eagerness and enthusiasm. You can see in their testimony that God has touched each of their lives. It is not only those answered prayers, which they willingly shared that captured my attention. It is their ATTITUDE towards God. Their willingness to allow God to work in their lives despite the obstacles they faced in their farming environment such as sorrow in having lost a loved one to sickness or to accident just like what people also face here in S'pore. They are not ashamed of the Gospel. They believe it is the power of God for salvation. All things are possible with God; I can do all things in Christ who strengthens me.

What is most evident in their faith is their belief in prayer. (Eph 6:18 "And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests")

If God is for us, who can be against us. Our Christian brothers & sisters in Udon Thani and Si Khiu have taught me and shown me the Power of God for Salvation if we are not ashamed of the Gospel.

Nobody goes into the harvest field to harvest stalk by stalk of paddy or wheat or corn. They harvest the whole field. I hear that not only 1 soul or 2 souls were saved but families of souls were being saved. I am also encouraged that the womenfolk played a major role by being the one to lead their households to Jesus Christ. The women were the ones who had accepted Jesus Christ first, who in turn shared with their children and then their husband. Persecution, rejection and ridicule were very evident yet they kept their faith by focusing on Jesus Christ.

(One sister who accepted Jesus Christ shared the Lord with her husband. He took a gun and wanted to kill her! For that husband has since accepted Jesus Christ as his Savior and Lord. Praise God! And he is currently serving as a council member in the Si Khiu Church.)

It is not easy-going for the Christians in Thailand since Buddhism is their country's main religion. Apart from Buddhism, black magic is also present. What can they do? How do they deal with it? Two things:

1. Eph 6:18 says - Pray with all kinds of prayers and requests. They pray and pray. They have a prayer session before worship service. Also testimonies on answered prayers were shared.
2. Hebrews 10: 24-25. Consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. Let us not give up meeting together to encourage one another.

MISSION TRIP TO N.E. THAILAND

One way of encouraging one another, which I learnt, was at the worship service at the Si Khiu Church. The worship leader asked – “Is there anyone who wants to testify for the LORD?” Within seconds a brother came forward to share.

Four application lessons learnt: -

1. Modernization has blocked us from God's blessing. These simple brothers and sister have this child-like faith and the willingness to be humbled before the LORD. One preacher shared this: With an attitude of willingness to _____ (Fill in the blank with “serve”, “give”, “love”, etc.) we will be able to draw strength, energy and power to do what God wants us to do for Him. Our brothers and sister in Udon Thani and Si Khiu are willing and so God blesses them. Amen!
2. Let us humble ourselves before God so that he will be able to let us be part of His bigger and better plans. They humbled themselves before God in their ministry and prayed before God and GOD is blessing them with big plans. I heard from the Si Khiu's church that God answered their prayer with a new church building which was just dedicated to God this Feb 2000.
3. Let us continue to learn to pray with a believing heart. They believed God will answer their prayer to increase their Cell Groups. They thereby committed their CG's expansion plan to God. And they are expanding. The average size of their CG is 30 to 60 members.
4. Let us not forget to encourage and spur one another whether we face obstacles or receive blessing. Our God is a great and awesome God who loves us and wants to work wonders through us.

May God look favorably on JCC as we learn from these brothers and sisters in Udon Thani and Si Khiu. Let us begin to humble ourselves like they do and pray with a believing heart and child-like faith, that God will work out His bigger and better plan for our Church. I pray that God will use the experiences of this mission exposure trip to encourage all as it has done for me.

God Bless. Amen.

Jim Lee

GOD IS TOUCHING THE ISAN

SAWASDEE. My life is somewhat different now. My lifestyle is still the same and my vocation remains as a housewife, but I have seen and talked with the people of Isan whose lives have been miraculously touched by God. People in northeast Thailand reminded me of those folks mentioned in Jesus' time – the blind could see and the lame walked.

Among the Isan people, Achan Bhuma left a deep impression on me. He is the evangelist who hosted us for two days in Nong Khai – near the Laos' border. I could only describe him using the words from Acts describing Stephen – a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit and a man full of grace and power was performing great wonders and signs among the people.

He accepted Christ as His Savior just nine years ago at the Singapore Thai Good News Centre. He literally heard God called out his name 'Bhuma! Bhuma!' while working as a construction worker here, but did not respond to the call then. After returning to his family - wife and 4 children (oldest now 18) in northeast Thailand, he worked as a paddy farmer; later attended a one-year Bible course and began his ministry in his village. He felt the call to start a base for declaring God's love in Nong Khai, and about a year ago rented a house in Nong Khai (same house where we stayed in).

No one in Nong Khai had heard of Jesus, and neighbours began to wonder what he was doing in their village. He said he was there to declare God, but nobody responded to the Gospel. Achan Bhuma did not know what to do. He then prayed for three days and three nights, and the next day, a dog came to his house and refused to budge. He fed the dog for a few days, before the owner came looking for it. He shared Jesus with the dog's owner, and the man accepted Christ. Strangely, the dog then followed its master home. After this event, another dog came and refused to go away and so he fed the dog, and after a few days, the dog's owner came looking for it. Achan Bhuma again shared Jesus with this man, and the man accepted Christ, and then his dog followed him home.

Achan Bhuma demonstrated great humility in all his ways and even in speech. Soft-spoken and quiet, he said he is a man with no skills and he has no strategies in reaching out to people. He prays very simply and the Lord in His time has touched the sick and poor in Nong Khai – some through him. The mission team spoke with a woman who had a stroke and was paralyzed for three years but could now walk; a blind man who was healed from his sores; a widow whose ten-year-old daughter met with a car accident but was brought back to life from the brink of death; a warm-hearted but over-worked woman who took an overdose of medicine in order to end her life but God saved her; and we also heard Achan Bhuma's testimony of an alcoholic of 30 years who felt an electric shock when Achan Bhuma held her up, and the next day she was healed from her alcoholism.

MISSION TRIP TO N.E. THAILAND

There are many more of such extraordinary stories. God seems to have chosen to demonstrate His power through Achan Bhuma. In the words of Achan Bhuma, all glory belongs to God; he is nothing more than a poor farmer so that he can only boast in the Lord. All glory be to you Lord Jesus!

Se Ping

A BLESSED MISSION TRIP TO NORTHEAST THAILAND

Seven of us including Pastor Michael and our Church's Council Chairman, Bro. Ronnie, departed Singapore on the night of 5th July for a four-day mission trip to Northeast Thailand. Having been commissioned before the congregation on the Sunday before, we were all 'spiritually-high'. We felt like Hudson Taylor who ventured into the unsaved world of China, to spread the Good News of Jesus to unknown people. As a novice in mission trip, it was with a sense of adventure as we travelled up to Udon Thani, which is more than 500 km northeast of Bangkok and about 90 km from the Laos' border. Especially so when our very own missionary, Rev Kee, told us that clean water could be a problem. (En route there, you should see the amount of bottled water that Bro. Ronnie carted from the petrol station.)

After a whole day of travelling in a mini-bus, it was rather tiring especially for the last few kilometres which was very bumpy. It was very dark when we reached the preaching station, which is about 50 km from the main town of Udon Thani. There, waiting for us were the evangelist, Achan Bhuma and his assistant Sompong. Immediately, the bond of Christianity drew us together and we were sharing and praising God. Once our arrival was known, the surrounding villagers joined us and through Rev Terry, we had a wonderful time of fellowship. The testimony of Achan was really Faith-in-Action. Achan was a foreign worker in Singapore when he accepted Christ, right here at the Singapore's Thai Good News Centre. Upon his return, he began to share the Good News in his village and beyond. Soon he had to moved closer to town in order to reach out to more people. He moved out of his village and rented a small house. For weeks, he was walking up and down the streets preaching the good news. However, none was converted and people were running away from him when he approached them. But God is great. The first covert at the preaching station was the owner of a dog which came to the station and refused to move away. Even the owner could not move the dog, and Achan seized the

opportunity to share Jesus with him. Later another dog came and did the same thing, and another man was converted. God works in wonderful ways beyond our imagination that even dogs can do his work.

The next day, we saw and heard testimonies that we only read about in the Bible. The first testimony was from a middle-aged woman who suffered a stroke and was bed-ridden for three years. Achan prayed for her healing and the same night, she felt the strength of God flowing through her body and she stood up and began to walk. We heard another woman who testified that God had indeed saved her daughter from near-death when her daughter was hit by a car. We fellowshiped with a blind man who was also a beggar and he was praising God. Before, he had sores all over his body and pus in his eyes. Now, his body is covered with beautiful skin and his eyes are dry by the grace of God. We were touched by such wonderful signs.

Truly, we can say, as in Roman 3:22, "This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God."

And as Brother Ronnie read at a cell meeting, "It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God".

Please pray with me for:

- a. The Christian workers in Thailand
- b. The purchase of a piece of land by the preaching station at Udon Thani, to be used for a church building and as a Christian burial ground.
- c. The building of a girls' hostel for children of villagers who live in remote villages, and for children of parents who have died of AIDS in Si Kheu.

Young Kwang

Food For Thought

July 2, 2000 - JCC celebrated its 33rd anniversary with a combined service and a buffet lunch. The official count was about 355 persons in the sanctuary alone. This figure excluded all the children and teachers of the Sunday School.

The church had passed an envelope around the previous week for free-will contributions to help defray the cost of the lunch. I think some people got the wrong idea that if they did not contribute, they were not entitled to the lunch. On the other hand, some of those who had contributed might have been dismayed that they were left without food due to an obvious shortage.

For years I have noticed that the church has been very judicious about not wasting food and has therefore always catered food based on a conservative estimate. (Previously, there had been occasions when food was catered in excess because the turnout was below expectation.) Probably, some thoughtful members who had contributed to the cost had also willingly skipped the lunch for the sake of visitors.



It is not easy to balance good stewardship (ensuring no wastage) and good hospitality (ensuring enough for all to share). One way is to issue coupons (paid for or free) to have a better gauge of the number of diners to be expected and let those without coupons (unanticipated diners) queue up behind those with coupons. This would have its drawback.

Alternatively, the church may just do away with a collection for the free-for-all lunch so that all are equally eligible to partake the meal without feeling unworthy or having

the perception that they are left out unfairly when there is a shortage of food. Although a generous contribution to defray the cost is an altruistic act, it is not a nice experience for anyone who makes such a contribution with expectation of food to

find out that there is nothing to eat.

The challenge for the next celebration meal is how to make it a warm reception for one and all with sufficient food to go round but no wastage. If you have thoughts to share, you are welcome to share them.

Martin Cheah.

New Vine Committee

After the English Council met on the 14th and 15th July, many new initiatives have been implemented. One of these initiatives is the increased awareness of The Vine as a tool of transmitting information from the leaders of the church to the members. With this increase importance and responsibility of The Vine, two new members have joined the team. They are none other than our pastors, Martin and Michael.

The first meeting of the new committee was held on the 19th July and some issues were discussed. In the future issues of The Vine, the council will disseminate some of the important decisions that have been discussed in the council meetings. Photos will be used sparingly due to the poor quality of the photocopy. The new committee has proposed that the church purchase a laser printer to print those pages with photos. Some other issues like ensuring the doctrinal accuracy of the articles and the responsibility of the pastors were discussed. Also, key members of the various ministries will be approached to provide articles, news and feedback for publication for the rest to be kept abreast of all the issues facing the church.

The Vine will be the only newsletter of JCC and all its other offshoots will now be incorporated into it. Therefore the Missions LINKs newsletter will cease to exist. The Worship Vine will also be absorbed into The Vine.

Already in this month's newsletter, we have people who have never submitted an article before and that is a good start. I am sure you will enjoy and be uplifted by their efforts. Please keep us in your prayers as we strive to forge a link or network between the leaders and you - the readers of The Vine.

NEW EDITORS



Pastor Martin Yee



Pastor
Michael Christian

THE VINE - STARTING A NEW