

# The Vine

The Vine Committee

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## Facing the Challenge of Consumerism

(Excerpt of sermon by **Rev. Dr William Chang** on the occasion of JCC's 41<sup>st</sup> Anniversary)

JCC is 41 years old. This is the beginning of middle-age. It has produced a new generation of Christians who are mainly in the youth's or young adults' ministry. Like any good parents, we want to pass on good family and moral values to our children. We too want to pass on good Christian values. Broadly speaking, the youths and adults in the church are considered our children. We have an obligation and responsibility to ensure that they continue to run the race faithfully, lifting high the Cross for all men to see. What Christian values do we want to pass on?

*Deut. 6:4-9, "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates."*

In essence, this is our Christian spirituality. The greatest challenge to the Church and to our spirituality in modern-day Singapore is consumerism. Consumerism advocates that the meaning of life is found in the enjoyment of the things that we possess. Therefore, life is about buying more and buying better. The Great Singapore Sale is but one example. During our time, we worked during the holidays to supplement family income and to buy resources for our spiritual development. These days, it seems that most young people work during holidays to buy branded goods for enjoyment.

The Bible teaches that God has created all things for our enjoyment. As sinners, there is a great tendency for us to enjoy the gift and forget the giver. Satan knows it and he is taking advantage of this weakness in us to bring us down. He plans his

warfare around this weakness of ours. Our Lord Jesus Christ addresses the issue in Matt. 4:1-4 (The Temptation of Jesus):

*“Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the desert to be tempted by the devil. After fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. The tempter came to him and said, “If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread.” Jesus answered, “It is written: ‘Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.’”*

We can glimpse two precious lessons about Christian spirituality and consumerism from the passage:

### Lesson 1 – Consumerism leads to serious spiritual consequence

Satan took advantage of Jesus’ hunger for food or bodily need to tempt him to use his divine powers for mere personal consumption. The enjoyment for hunger is of course food; and for thirst, water. Our Lord Jesus recognizes that the enjoyment of the things we possess is subject to our enjoyment of God in our lives. That is why he refuses to turn the stone into bread. Consumerism ends up in self-interest, self-righteousness and self-destruction as we take things into our own hands. An example from the OT is found in a sad story of Israel’s failure, Numbers 20:2-5:

*“Now there was no water for the community, and the people gathered in opposition to Moses and Aaron. They quarreled with Moses and said, ‘If only we had died when our brothers fell dead before the LORD! Why did you bring the LORD’s community into this desert, that we and our livestock should die here? Why did you bring us up out of Egypt to this terrible place? It has no grain or figs, grapevines or pomegranates. And there is no water to drink!’”*

The Israelites had just witnessed and experienced the great working out of God’s power in parting the Red Sea for them to walk on dry land to escape into the desert. The consumerism in them (enjoyment found only in things they possessed and not in God alone) resulted in self-righteousness, rebellion, anger, doubt and rejection of God. What happened to them in the end? Let us see their spiritual consequence in 1 Corinthians 10:1-5:

*“For I do not want you to be ignorant of the fact, brothers, that our forefathers were all under the cloud and that they all passed*

*through the sea. They were all baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea. They all ate the same spiritual food and drank the same spiritual drink; for they drank from the spiritual rock that accompanied them, and that rock was Christ. Nevertheless, God was not pleased with most of them; their bodies were scattered over the desert.”*

Consumerism confuses Christian spirituality. It gives the false impression that everything about the Christian life or spirituality is about God granting wishes for material enjoyment in life. Having a good education and job is all about possessing more things and enjoying them as long as we can. In some sectors of Christianity, this becomes a form of spirituality in prayer. Prayer is about God granting me my needs my way through my faith. The prayer list sometimes looks like a shopping list. Such an idea of prayer only reinforces the love and trust of self. On the contrary, the Bible teaches that prayer is about God meeting our needs His way. Prayer is about seeking out of God’s will. True Christian prayer builds love and trust in God. Consumerism prayer only reinforces a selfish love of self over God.

### Lesson 2 – Consumerism weakens our obedience to God’s Word

*Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.'*

It is interesting to note that elsewhere in the Bible, Jesus performed many miracles; but here, he withheld a miracle. Why?

The background of this temptation is Genesis 3:1-6. In the Garden of Eden, Adam and Eve yielded to the temptation by Satan; fell into sin and out of God’s grace. The words that came out of the mouth of God in the garden were, *“You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden, and you must not touch it, or you will die.”* Instead, they believed in the words from Satan’s mouth, *“You will surely not die.”*

Adam and Eve ate against the Word of God. They ate and hence disobeyed God. Adam failed to be the kind of head God intended him to be of the human race. Jesus is the second Adam, the head of the new spiritual race that God shall redeem in Christ. Therefore, to the Jews in particular, our Lord Jesus had to prove himself worthy and qualified to be that head, the head God intended him to be. That was why he did not eat and hence obeyed God. Our Lord Jesus would not trust the words of Satan as Adam

and Eve did. Our Lord Jesus' enjoyment was in obeying and honouring God and not in the things he possessed. Our Lord's counter to consumerism is, *'Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.'*

Consumerism (finding enjoyment in the things we possess) distracts us from God, causes us to lose interest or desire in the things of God, especially His Word. Once we lose interest in God's Word, we lose trust in God. Once we lose trust in God, we lose God eventually. The Word of God is important because it tells us God's will so that we may live a life of obedience, of honour and glory to God.

The challenge of the Church in modern-day Singapore is consumerism. Singapore is a consumer society, a society which spurs us on to buy new and better things as a way of life. Advertisements are designed to create dissatisfaction in what we already have (old things) so that you may buy more new things and find new and better enjoyment. This is what they call quality of life. This may be good for businesses but not good for the soul. Life becomes an endless enjoyment of the things possessed. The focus is on things and not on God anymore. God becomes vague in our lives, in our children's lives; so vague that when he disappears totally, we are not even aware.

JCC is 41 years old now. We have gone into middle-age. We have the second generation with us. We must remember and do well to impress upon them and also ourselves to *"Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength,"* so that this would be our declaration from generation to generation. The solution to consumerism is Christian Spirituality: Love God and love man.

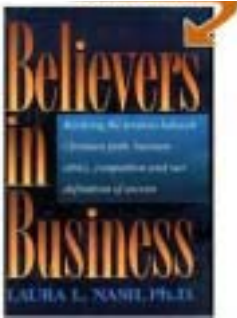
May this be the focus of all that we do in JCC from adults to children. In this way, JCC will continue to be blessed and be a blessing to all around us for a long time to come. Amen.

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### **JCC celebrates 41 years of existence within the community of Taman Jurong.**



continued from the June 2008 issue of The Vine



**BOOK REVIEW**

**by Goh Young Kwang**

***Believers in Business*** by Laura L. Nash, PhD

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Tension 6: Charity and Wealth

*“We have a choice: we either seek God or live by the laws of his Kingdom as Jesus taught in the beatitudes or else we worship money and live for the consumption and the creation of a fortune.” – Brian Griffiths*

In the US as well as in Singapore, the income gap between the top and bottom income levels in the corporate world is significant and widening. The remark that someone is filthy rich and not just very rich is used. Even though celebrations of the poor are abundant in the Bible (especially the New Testament), material dependencies are accepted as part of life. In the parable of the talents, economic reward is built into stewardship. Quoting one interviewee, “I think you should find, certainly, in the Christian’s office, a lesser emphasis on material things as a sign of success.”

It is very important for the Christian CEO to remove himself from the cultural context of the wealthy, not just for reasons of its secularity, but for its debilitating effect on his awareness of the less advantaged. Giving is a very significant concept and many take seriously the biblical command to tithe. No one expressed resentment about giving. They have a special understanding of the concept of charity itself; they see charity as being opposed to consumption. Spending is getting for himself; charity is the giving to others. Few would simply give money away; many focused their giving on things that they know will be productive; i.e., good investments.

Tension 7: Faithful Witness in the Secular City

In the eighteenth century or even the nineteenth century, religion was part and parcel of daily living. Education was mainly through religious schools with God as the central theme. Today not only is Jesus banned from public discussion, but even the word “God” has been excised from the vocabulary of institutional belief as well. What was once taken for granted is now seen as offensive and old-fashioned. Secularization raises severe cultural and moral conflict for the Christian businesspersons. As effective business leaders, they are to conform and constantly encounter the opportunity or pressure to participate in cultural practices that go directly against their faith. They are both part of the modern culture and yet not of it. They are to bear witness to their faith, and the conflicts they face are acutely felt.

One of the main choices wrestled with is the choice of business associates. Should this be exclusive in order to be consistent with one's faith? Alternatively, to accept the pluralism as part and parcel of the business world? While they can restrict their business association as much as possible to those who share the same values, it is more problematic when it is a question of peer association, or of seeking professional advice from boards, legal representatives or just friends in similar positions. The fellowship of Christian business also raises the question of exclusivity and unfair advantage.

Another contentious situation is hiring practices and employment policy. Most interviewees drew a sharp distinction between their private association and their employment policies.

As owner and/or CEO, how can they express their faith within the companies that they are leading? Many are constrained by legal requirements, to restrain from stamping their faith into their business practices and policies. Interestingly, most of them rejected the idea of wearing their faith on their sleeve. Many prefer creating a consistent values environment through personal character and leadership, and personal witnessing. Prayer is the bulwark of the faithful against the secularity of language and thought in business. Most if not all, pray regularly and belong to prayer groups.

### Conclusion

By no means are the above tensions the only challenges faced by Christian bosses. They represent the major challenges and their responses provide many useful insights. From Laura's careful interviews and study, we can learn many lessons from the many successful CEOs. These CEOs are not only successful in their business but they are also successful in their personal lives and more importantly, they have kept their faith in GOD.

The lessons learnt and insights are relevant to anyone who is just starting their working career, in mid-career with the many mid-life crises and even for those who are in the twilight of their working life.



BB & Dialect Ministry again joining forces at Bo Tien Home on 19 July.



# **Our Family's Vacation in America.**

Margaret, Rachel, Matthias and myself had our vacation in America from 22 May to 3 Jun. (Marcus and Mervyn were unable to join us due to their work and study commitments.)

The entire vacation was supposed to be adventure after adventure, especially so for Matthias because it was his 1st time ever to set foot on America's soil. It was an eye opener for him to experience the 16-hour flight to Los Angeles International Airport with an hour transit at Japan's Narita Airport.

Thank the Lord for all answered prayers and those of you who have joined us in prayer partnership for journey mercy. We had a very real experience of this right at the start of the journey. Perhaps, it may be said that our adventure started on board Flight SQ12. The plane moved away from the aerobridge and then stopped. I knew something was amiss when the plane did not take off after what seemed an inordinate length of time.

Later, the plane was reberthed and the air ventilation shut off. Passengers were fanning themselves frantically with the on-board magazines as the bright morning sun was of no help to reduce the heat in the cabin. A startling announcement came from the plane's Captain that the cockpit's fire alarm was sounding. This announcement only added anxiety to the passengers who assumed that there might be a fire. For added measure, the airport firemen were in sight, clothed in their protective suits (like spacemen). It was a huge relief when they reported no fire.

Next, the aircraft technical team was called. They were unable to get to the bottom of the problem. The solution: All passengers were told to disembark while arrangement was being made for them to board another plane, which eventually came after an hour of delay.

I may forever not know what the problem was, because no reason was given by the airline. Nevertheless, praise God for His perfect timing in the sounding of the cockpit's alarm prior to take-off. I couldn't imagine the would-be scenario onboard if the alarm were to come on only when the plane was in mid-air some 11000 metres above an ocean.

We had an enjoyable time in Anaheim's Disneyland, California's Adventure Park, Universal Studios and a Coach Ride from Las Vegas (Nevada) to view the Hoover Dam and the Grand Canyon on our Western Rim tour. This should have more than made up for the inconvenience we had at journey beginning.

Truly, we have to thank God for ensuring our well-being to enjoy the family vacation to the fullest.

We were blessed to be able to have one full day of fun in Hollywood Adventure Park without incident. Never would we have expected that after we had left the place and travelled down to another county, Las Vegas, Nevada, news broke that certain parts of the Park was on fire! We came to hear the news only after returning to Singapore, when Cecilia told us.

On the 3rd night when we were in the Anaheim's Inn, however, we did hear bad news from the weather forecast that Nevada was under severe thunderstorms and lightnings. Mercifully, God answered our prayers. While there was rain along the way out of California, towards Nevada, the Lord granted us four days there with beautiful sunshine – no rain, thunder or lightning. Wow!

We could not be more grateful for the Lord's presence and protection with us throughout. You see, while we were on the flight from Narita Airport to Hong Kong on the way to Singapore, the Captain envisaged very long rough patches of air turbulence and requested all passengers to be seated with belts fastened. All cabin crews were also instructed to stop services and return to their seats for safety reason. We prayed for the Lord's mercy. The Lord answered. We felt a slight shaking of the plane for only a little while before everything went back to normal. Hallelujah!

How The Lord really took care of us! We cannot but praise and worship Him. We are truly and completely amazed by His mighty hands of protection, and His compassionate Love in granting all our hearts' desire.

Closing thought:

*Some might say that indeed we were lucky.*

*Some might say that our stars were shining.*

*Some might say well that God blesses us all.*

*But, to my family and me, it was more than just "God blesses ..."*

*He Is Alive, answering prayers and definitely still working miracles.*

May all glory, honour and praise be to our miraculous Lord God Almighty.  
Amen.

*Richard Lee & family.*

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Many other stories and articles have been held over for the next issue of The Vine. Please continue to share your life stories and God's invisible hand at work to encourage readers of The Vine. - *Editor*



# A Banquet on 18<sup>th</sup> August

Singapore is going to celebrate her 43rd birthday this 9<sup>th</sup> August. “Regrettably”, Singaporeans missed out on the beautiful date 8.8.08 by just one day, an auspicious date to the Chinese and the specially chosen date for China to host her first Olympic Games. Noteworthy, however, is that no matter what the numbers in the date are, it (the date *per se*) bodes nothing really significant to Christians, non-Chinese and non-superstitious folks. The numbers aside, the events themselves (National Day and Olympics) are of course momentous to the celebrants, bringing them great pride and joy.

It is possible for everyone to enjoy a great event and remember the message of import without being sidetracked by superfluous considerations. For example, as people around the world anticipate the approaching modern Olympics with excitement, they can dwell on the significance and meaning of the Olympic torch, flag, rings, etc., without misplacing their focus on the ancient myths and religious associations that the Games carried. Similarly, as we Singaporeans celebrate our National Day with heartiness, we can dwell on how a young nation came to be, the meaning of the symbols on our National flag, the industry of our forefathers, the foresight and contributions of our leaders, etc. All the good things that we remember appreciatively help us to value the past, draw on the weighty lessons and keep the right bearing now to assure continuing national stability and well-being for future generations. Additionally, we Christians appreciate God’s hand in everything and every happening. Therefore, it is right that we give thanks and praise to God for all the blessings that we are able to enjoy.

It is certainly right for us to thank God. It is right too for us to show our appreciation to our leaders. All this we do in the broad context of remembering both the spiritual and the human sources of our good life (饮水思源). It becomes out of place when, in doing that which is right, we opportunistically go off-tangent to sing our own praises – boasting to other nations (and maybe denigrating their “inferior” leadership), or gratuitously allowing specific individuals or groups some self-accolades to earn the applause of men. We can truly praise God without the praise of men flowing off from it by design. Sometimes, people extol the virtues of great men of the past or great leaders of the present all for the respectable

purpose of encouraging the young generation to emulate the good works of their ancestors and elders. This should be done with care, to avoid the unpleasantness of the act being mistaken for self-congratulation.

In connection with our National Day, there will be a special banquet at the Padang on 18<sup>th</sup> August hosted by a group from several churches *"to honor our founding church fathers – those who served God within the nation of Singapore between the years 1959 – 1978. Many of these precious fathers in the Lord are still with us and serving God while some have gone on to be with the Lord. 1959 would mark the year Singapore came under 'self – government' and 1978 would mark the occasion when Dr. Billy Graham pronounced a new name over Singapore as the 'Antioch of Asia'."*

I came to know that the invitation has been sent out by the group *"to all pastors of the city to be a part of a prophetic moment in the history of our nation."*

Why is our National Day a prophetic moment? The organizer of the banquet explains it as follows:

*"Lev 25:8-10 "Count seven times seven years, a total of forty-nine years. V9. Then, on the tenth day of the seventh month, the Day of Atonement, send a man to blow a trumpet throughout the whole land. V10. In this way you shall set the fiftieth year apart and proclaim freedom to all the inhabitants of the land. During this year all property that has been sold shall be restored to the original owner or his descendants, and anyone who has been sold as a slave shall return to his family." (NIV)*

*This year Singapore as a nation completes "six cycles" ( 7 X 6 = 42 ) and commences her "seventh" and her last cycle ( 43 – 49 + 1 = 50 ), as she enters into her very 1st Jubilee in August 2015.*

*At this very important "point of transition" ( 42 turning 43 ), we are sensing that God is calling us, as Pastors and Leaders of the Church of Singapore, to receive the "Father's" (Church Fathers Of Our Nations ) blessings at this very important junction / juncture, to take Singapore into her Jubilee blessings over the next seven years ( 2008 – 2015 )."*

A special highlight of the banquet is that *"the Minister overseeing all families in Singapore, Dr Vivian will be sharing with us a vision, a vision that concerns the families and the future of our children and our nation."*

Apart from the 18<sup>th</sup> August event, *"on 9 July, the Director, Rehabilitation, Protection & Residential Services of MCYS, Mr. Jason Wong, will be joining us to share this vision briefly with us. In particular, he will be sharing the SPIRITUAL significance behind this vision and the blessings that this will add to the churches. Many of us know Jason Wong as the man who spearheaded the nation-wide Yellow Ribbon Project in 2004, whilst he was a Directorate member of the Singapore Prisons Service and the CEO of SCORE."*

I understand that not all pastors of the city share the fervour about the merit of the banquet by the way that its purpose is articulated. Hence, I expect that only some but not all pastors of the city will enthusiastically turn up on the occasion. I happen to share the same view as some that the purpose of the banquet is not well stated. This view was put in the following words by a former pastor of JCC:

*"There are many who like to 'spiritualise' things that are not spiritual in nature. I don't know why. Maybe it is better sound bites among Christians. Be careful not to get your hot buttons pressed without thinking. I won't mind if they bill this as an appreciation for the founding leaders of the churches in Singapore. But to make it sound so mystical and spiritualise the event, with special blessings etc. given out sounds very much like the Middle Ages when special dispensation from the Pope is often worded as such. Furthermore it uses scriptures wrongly using a passage on the establishment of the Jubilee in the Jewish calendar to call for special significance for unabashed promotion of their event during this year in the nation's history."*

Personally, I also wonder whether the word "vision" is being overused by many people such that it becomes difficult to understand whether this vision is the same as that vision when anything ranging from respectable human foresight to divine revelation, as well as from dream to illusion, has the tendency of being cloaked with an aura of spirituality that the V-word carries. Without doubt, our Church Fathers are worthy of our respect, admiration and emulation for their faith and contribution; but I do not think it is very appropriate to raise them up with human honour on a day "very

special". Noting that "Many of these precious fathers in the Lord are still with us and serving God" (as the invitation mentions), the human high praise, especially with public prominence, may be a tad immodest.

I am also puzzled by the tenuous link between the Year of Jubilee (in Leviticus) and our National Day. (Maybe there is similarity I have yet to understand between the deliverance of the Israelites from their oppression under the Egyptians and the liberation of Singapore islanders from Malaysia.) Well, if we were to agree with the Leviticus passage, why restrict to 25:8-10? Why not go through all the instructions in the verses thereafter and make the connections with what we as a nation have to do today to seize the "prophetic moment in the history of our nation"?

Of all the tasks that we have to do (by God's instructions in Leviticus), I think gathering for a grand banquet at the Padang with speeches by honorable leaders of the nation and raising praises for men (especially those mingling among us) is not of utmost significance, even if it has some meaning within the celebratory spirit of National Day.

Incidentally, I am just curious why the 7 x 7 years should count from Independence Day and not Modern Singapore's Founding Day (harking back to Sir Stamford Raffles) or Old Singapore's Founding Day (harking back to Sang Nila Utama) or the day the first inhabitant entered the land? (Rf Lev. 25:2). The Book of Leviticus is basically a set of legal rules about God's covenant with Israel. When we import the holy Word from B.C. (*Before Christ*) to A.D. (*Anno Domini*) for our study on their current relevance, Bible scholars would agree that it is not for literal adoption without giving due regard to the "Law fulfilled in Christ" fact!

In conclusion, I humbly beg to differ on the spiritual significance of the banquet planned for 18<sup>th</sup> August in relation to our National Day. On a non-spiritual perspective, however, a celebration with due recognition for the major contributions of this young nation's founding leaders is beneficial in contributing some useful historical awareness for the current generation of people enjoying the fruits of our forefathers' hard work.



*John Lee*

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Two companies of the Girls' Brigade came together to raise funds by selling food and stuff on 20 July

# HOUSE BLESSING

Hi all,

Thanks to pastors, uncles and aunts from Dialect Ministry, Youth Leaders, PJians and all who came to my house on the 6<sup>th</sup> July 2008 to bless this house.

Indeed, it was a special day for me as I have always wanted my house to be a place set aside to glorify God and a place where people can come to fellowship and pray.



As the day drew nearer, I didn't know what was going to happen on that day and I didn't know who would be coming. My mum asked me not to invite too many people that she don't know as she is not comfortable with them. So I called aunt Susan and asked her who was coming and she told me a list of people. In my mind, I am crossing out people who she don't know but on the other hand I told myself that I am going to trust God that He is going to make a difference.

Finally, 6<sup>th</sup> of July was here. I asked Rev Chang what was he going to do and he told me that he was going to share and pray in Chinese. The first to come to my house were Pei Ern and Joseph as they had to leave early to go out for dinner with their parents. We watched Alvin and the Chipmunks. We had great laughs watching the movie. After which they when off.

It was 5 plus, I can see from my mother's face that she is anxious about who is coming, what we are doing, whether the house can fit all the people, will the food be enough and many more... Chih Chiang, my best buddy arrived and we chatted.

It is now 6pm and why are there no people coming yet? My mum when to the kitchen to take a peek at the car park and she saw no cars coming. She was worried that the people are not coming. I told her that maybe the dialect service ended late. Soon, I saw the pastors coming, followed by the dialect ministry and then the youths.

Pastor told us about what we are doing today and told us the importance of house blessing. We started worshipping the Lord with Chih Chiang leading us in songs. Then the dialect ministry sang hokkien and cantonese songs. I was touched by the words of the lyrics and so was my mum. Pastors prayed for our living room, bedrooms, and kitchen.



Yes, we had some food (Wasn't the food nice? Uncle Vincent and my mum prepared it) and fellowship with one another. We chatted and played games. Without realizing, it was late and it was time to go home.

Would like to thank,

all of you who were here with us, your presence really meant a lot to my family and I

Pei Ern and Joseph for watching the movie with me!

Rev Chang for giving the message in chinese so that my mum could understand. Aunty Laura for praying for my kitchen and for talking to my mum

Pastor Anthony for being so willing to help me with all the preparation and the choosing of the dates

Dialect Ministry for going all out to do all the preparations and even coming to our house after a long day of ministry

Uncle Peter and Aunty Jessie, I really want to thank you for always inviting my mum to the dialect service and you for agreeing on the spot when I invited you to our house blessing

Aunty Susan and Uncle James for helping me to inform all the dialect people about this house blessing and also always

SMSing my mum and encouraging her to come for the dialect service

Uncle Wilfred for playing the guitar so well :) and Aunty Julie for talking to my mum, indeed she knows you a bit better and I hope that you can strike up more conversations with her.



Uncle Martin for taking some photos for the day and Aunty Joo See for your beautiful voice

Aunty Seline for singing so well and talking to my mum, uncle Kin Siong and family for your presence here

Aunty Peggy and Aunty Lucy for talking to my mum

Aunty Swee Eng for telling my mum that her house is nice and even taking the contractor's number from my mum ( My mum is really happy when someone tells her that her house is nice)

Uncle Vincent for cooking the BO BO CHA CHA and all the food with my mum for us and also Aunty Adeline for helping my mum in the serving

Not forgetting the Chih Chiang for preparing such wonderful songs for worship, Jonathan and Benedict for representing the PJ (PJ rules) and playing with me to quite late and last but not least Meryvn ,although you are late but thank you for the wonderful time in playing games and time chatting. I really enjoy all your presence



Once again, on behalf of my family I want to thank you for everything! Especially the words that were spoken to my mum. I can see that she is touched by God's love and indeed this is another step closer to God!

THANK YOU!!!

Roger



# God open our eyes!

God has always been faithful to this Church, and as I look at the people that he has blessed us with he has given us many faithful leaders who desire to see the growth of the church. With the recent renovation of the church and the hope to see the church to be rebuilt in the next 10 years or so, I'm reminded about what Rev Chang shared on the need for the church to grow and be built up as a body of Christ before we plan for the physical rebuilding of the church. Building the church spiritually first than the physical rebuilding makes sense.

Recently what has been weighing upon my heart is the new youths who have come to this church and have left due to various reasons. Though I also thank God for the people whom he has brought to this church whose parents are not attending this church and they have remained faithful to grow and serve, e.g. Josel, Roger, Zhiqiang, Zhenglin, Junhao, the BB boys, Peiqi, Alicia, Caleb, Stephanie, Marcus, Ken, Wenbing and Lynnest.

Lynnest was baptized some years back and now her mother, Alice is regularly attending the Dialect Ministry and serving as well. Slowly through one, God will bring the household to Himself as last week we saw Francis, Lynnest father attending the dialect service as well. Do keep him in your prayers.

I have been asking God how we can grow as a church, we have been 'trying' for the past 41 years with very faithful and hardworking leaders. God open my eyes in the most unexpected way. I recently turned 30, a week ago, so my JC friends from the first 3 months JC, wanted to celebrate for me. We arranged to meet at Vivocity to eat at Sushi Tei. During dinner, I started to share with them the burden I had for the new people who have come and left the church and the struggles that I faced. My friends tried to encourage me and on the way back home I took the bus with one of my friends, Favian. He shared with me that their church started out as a family church like ours, with about 200 people. They were a fundamentalist church, meaning that they were very traditional and strict in certain teachings of the Bible, even more so than our church. Then their pastor began preaching on the work of the Holy Spirit and to be filled with the Spirit, empowered to do the will of God, His mission for the church. They started a 'netcasting' movement, which is essentially an evangelism thrust. Evangelism is not done only by the evangelism committee but it is



the mission of the whole church as a body. Every one has their part to play to reach out. They were all trained to use their Gospel tracts and actively went out to share in pairs. They were made ready in season and at any opportunity to share the Gospel in obedience to the Great Commission.

God honored their obedience to his call for the church and their church grew from about 200 members to 1000 members. That sharing with my friend really opened up my eyes to see the harvest. The movement of reaching out to the community through the sharing of the gospel is not new to me as I had received training from Campus Crusade for Christ a number of years back. But the difference now is that the Holy Spirit has convicted me and now gives me the burden to share. Sharing not reluctantly or of the flesh but of the Spirit. I know that it is not me but Christ who is going the do the sharing of the Gospel. What He requires of us is obedience to His call, the Great Commission.

My prayer is that God will open up our eyes and convict us by the Spirit as we go forth to share with our friends, family and the community. The church is going to have a Christmas outreach on Christmas Eve. While the planning is still in progress, let be prepared to invite our friends and relatives. We need to be ready in season and out of season, prepared to share the good news and as a church reach out and prepare the way for Christ who is coming again.

**PEI'EN**

**New Church Office**



Many of us have wondered into the new English section's office and like what they see. Well, it's new and it's functional and hopefully, it will give the staff the motivation to work in its confines for the furtherance of God's kingdom.

# HEARING GOD

Does God speak to us today? How can we hear him?

The Bible is the living Word of God inspired by the Holy Spirit. We often approach the Bible with a cognitive (mental) or historical level. Yet we are told that Scripture must be studied in the context of a dynamic growing relationship with God. We may read Scripture as an historical account of how God acted in the past rather than a divine record of how people like us can have a personal relationship with God. Daniel Wallace, a professor at Dallas Theological Seminary testifies, “The last few years of my spiritual life has gone off track, we have learnt to do without the third person of the Trinity. Mine has become a cognitive faith – Christianity from the neck up.” In practice we have come to believe that the Trinity consists of Father, Son and Holy Scripture. Have we over-emphasized the written word to the neglect of the Spirit?

We may substitute Bible Study for a dynamic relationship with God. The Holy Spirit is the primary manifestation of the presence of the Trinity among us. He is the one who is most prominently present within us. The Holy Spirit speaks to us, just as we can interact with the Spirit in conversation, prayer, worship and thanksgiving. He is called the Spirit of Christ (Rom 8:9). Peter Toon, a theologian explains, “We are not to think that the Spirit and Christ are the same, rather the ‘Spirit indwelling’ and Christ in you’ are synonymous.” Thus the Lordship of Christ over his own is now experienced by the presence and activity of the Holy Spirit in our lives. On earth now, Jesus is known through the Spirit.

God spoke to Adam and Eve and to Moses, face to face. We tend to think that these are highly exceptional moments. However, they are examples of the normal human life, God intended for us – God indwelling His people through personal presence and fellowship. We live through God regularly speaking in our souls, we live not on bread alone, “but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.” Note here Jesus is referring to a God who speaks His words forth to us.

We should be engaged like the Biblical people in communication with God. The Israelite heard the voice of God speaking to them (Duet 4:33), the high priests and God had conversations at the Ark of the Covenant, the Psalmists cry out to be taught by God (Ps 143:10), the prophets such as Isaiah conversed with God, (Is 58:9,11)

Surely the Spirit who indwells in us is not mute, surely the abiding of Christ in us involves communication. How could there be a personal relationship with God or anyone else without individualized communication?

## **Hearing from God**

If God does indeed speak to us personally, how do we hear Him?

When we engage in conversation, it is part of our relationship with God. God speaks to us as part of a loving relationship we have with him. Like a child we seek to please our father, not just to avoid trouble or gain favour but the child lovingly abandons his little self to the parent. In marriage, the beloved is both loved and is loved, delights and rests in one another, in a 'one flesh' relationship. So it is in our relationship with God, our delight is to love Him with all our being.

Too often we think of God as a task master, a cosmic boss, whose chief task is to order humans around, whose pleasure is to see us jump at His command, always there to catch us when we fail. The Bible tells us that we are God's friend (Jn 15:15) and his fellow worker (1 Cor 3:9).

Hearing God can only occur in the context of His presence with us. Our communion with God provides the appropriate context, the Bible speaks of how the Word came individually to people. In the same way they experience God's communion, we can prayerfully and boldly believe such things can happen to us. Only then will we be able to recognize, accept and dwell in such experiences when they come.

We have to recognize that we are important enough for God to give us His Son and to choose to indwell in us as His living temple. Obviously, we are important enough for Him to want to communicate with us. God speaking to us does not in itself make us important, but it gives us greater opportunity to be and to do good and a greater responsibility for care of others. If we allow God's conversation with us to make us think we are people of great importance, His voice will certainly be withdrawn. In seeking to receive God's word we must seek the grace of humility. God speaking to us does not prove that we are righteous or even right. The infallibility of the messenger and the message does not guarantee the infallibility of our reception. Humility is always called for.

The words of the familiar hymn reminds us,

This is my Father's world:  
He shines in all that's fair;  
in the rustling grass I hear Him pass;  
He speaks to me everywhere.

God does indeed speak, are we attentive to His voice?

*Tan Swee Leong*

## **Woman Study Group's visit to the Lutheran Church in Germany**

by 3 sisters

I acknowledge God's grace in blessing me with the privilege to participate in this wonderful educational tour.

The German virtue of thrift and good manners impressed me. The Germans are environmentally friendly too.

We had a very comprehensive tour covering the life of Martin Luther (1483-1546) and the Reformation, with full appreciation of the social & cultural background and conditions of that time. The good work of Luther was carried down to Pastor Loehe (1837-1872), who started community work to help the poor to be self-sufficient. Diakonie Neuendettelsau is one of the oldest social institutions in Germany founded in 1854 by Pastor Wilhelm Loehe. The Diakonissen (deaconesses) were active all over southern Germany and beyond, caring professionally for the elderly, the disabled and the sick. Today this institution has developed into a modern enterprise with more than 5,800 employees offering professional services and up-to-date establishments, always seeking to supply the best possible care for those entrusted to the institute. The foundation and motivation behind the institution has always stayed the same: To testify for the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ in Word and deed by living a Christian life working professionally making responsible use of economic resources



I was amazed by the extensive work of women in Bavaria which covered many facets from care & concern for the aged, the sick and handicapped, to the social welfare & health of women at home & in society. I was encouraged by the Deaconesses in Neuendettelsau and the Sisters of the Castellar

Ring in Erfurt for their love of God and His work.

I enjoyed my daily morning devotions at the garden below our rooms at Mew, listening to the birds singing. The Chapel at Mew was also beautiful.

I'm grateful to Rev. T. Paulsteiner and Rev Urike Hansen for their hospitality; we will always remember their kindness rendered to us. We had a garden BBQ dinner at Pastor Hansen's home. Apart from this, we also enjoyed good breakfast, lunch

and dinner throughout our stay, with plenty of good time together for photo taking.

**Juria Ang**

I truly thank LCS and its counterpart in Germany for making this study tour such a blessing for me personally.

I did not know what to expect in this journey but everything was very enriching spiritually and an eye-opener for what we stand for as Christians today. This trip to Germany was very intense but very well-coordinated. It fulfilled its purpose and I gained more from it than what I could ever imagine in such a short time of learning about the faith of our fathers through Martin Luther's life.

This journey recalls the life and work of Martin Luther. It is very meaningful to understand Martin Luther's entire career and his devotion, and the special call that he received from God that led to the Reformation. We spent time at Wittenberg, where Martin Luther spent most of his time teaching the word of God. It filled me with a special feeling just to be there to survey the place.

The most uplifting thing for me was to learn how Martin Luther's 95 Theses were prepared, written and delivered to the church then, announcing his views that only God has the power to grant free pardon to sinners who truly feel sorry for their sins, and money has nothing to do with the pardon. Luther's influence spread from Wittenberg to the world in concentric circles just like the ripples of water expanding outward when a stone is dropped into a pond.

I enjoyed the company of the many other sisters in the group and the unity and bonding that we had. It was so special coming from JCC meeting sisters from



other Lutheran churches and being in unity. I am glad for the friendship we forged while abroad, which wouldn't have been possible here – we have become really good friends!

I felt so welcomed and really at home while in Mission Einewelt (One World Mission body in Bavaria) for their warmth and hospitality,

speaking my mother tongue with those who were once missionaries and seeing the many artifacts they have collected as mementos. The hosts were helpful and dedicated to the entire program just so as to make sure we did all that we did for a full educational experience.

I count it a blessing to have been one of the 20 sisters on this unforgettable trip!

### *Gift Humphrey Muze*

After 16hrs of traveling and with much anticipation, 20 sisters of LCS, lead by Mrs John Tan (Jean) arrived at Nuremberg in Germany. Reverend Thomas Paulsteiner (Regional Secretary for East Asia) greeted us at the airport.

We were introduced to Rev. Ulrike Hansen, a lady pastor serving at the Department for Mission & Intercultural Studies, Women & Gender Studies and Director Rev. P. Weigand shared the insight of the work done at N'au as a centre for World Mission.

*Everyday was packed full, with many activities and sites to visit.* The daily routine was as follows:-

7.45am Breakfast

8.15am Prayer & Devotion with MEW (Mission EineWelt) staff

12.15pm Lunch

18.00pm Dinner

We received an introduction into Reformation History by Rev. Mrs. Dr. Dorothea Vorlanender. We visited the Loehe Era Museum and Rev. Horst Becker shared the works done by William Lohe for the people in this town.



We visited the Diaconal Institutions, lead by Rev. U. Hansen and met deacon, Ms. Rimroth and deaconess, Dr. Ruth Ganstaller. We were given a great insight on the works done at the Institutions. Their projects are reaching out to the needy and poor people.

We had a guided tour in Nuremberg, visited churches and learned their historical background. The churches were magnificent. We had a good time discussing with

a few Muslim Sisters and Christian Sisters who came together sharing their faith, needs, and fellowship together.

In Stein, we visited the Department for Women's Work of ELCB. Sharing their work Mrs Kolbl and Ms Muller shared her work on the World Day of Prayer.

Everyone was looking forward to free time and shopping at Nuremberg Square with the many shops and cafés. That evening we enjoyed a *Musical Devotion from Windsbach Boy's Choir* at St. Lorenz Cathedral, a historical, grand church, a very enriching experience.



On our free morning the group went shopping. With our lists, we moved around the area and ended up shopping in the small shops and supermarket in this beautiful small town.

We departed from MEW for a 4 day **Grand Tour to follow the foot-prints of Dr. Martin Luther**. As it was Sunday, we had devotion and prayer in the coach with a short message from Mrs Jean Tan. After about 4hrs, we arrived at Eisenach, and had a guided tour at the Wartburg Castle. The Castle is located up on the hill and many of us had a hard time trying to reach the Castle. The view is fantastic. Thereafter, we proceeded to Erfurt where we toured and stayed two nights at the Augustinian

Monastery, which is so serene and beautiful.

We had lunch in the Monastery and had a guided tour around Erfurt. The Café run by the nuns just at the entrance of the Church is open to the retired and to the public to come for chitchat or to share their needs. This is a very good concept for outreach.

At Wittenberg, we visited Castle Church, Town Church, Lutherhaus, and Melanchthonhuas. The town is beautiful and with much historical background and buildings. We visited Eisleben home of Dr. Martin Luther, who was born and also died here. Eisleben is one of the oldest towns and the town center with the late Middle Ages marketplace is dominated by the impressive ensemble Town

Hall, St Andrew's church and Luther Statue. The house where Luther died is opposite St Andrew's Church and is now used as a museum. The Bible House is Luther birthplace and is now a historical museum.

On our last day in MEW, we had another insight on the Social Service in N'au and Women's work in Windsbach Circuit. Our Study Tour ended here with a Farewell Dinner. It was a night full of merry fun and the group presented a Chinese Hymn "Jehovah's Blessing Abound" for the Hosts, secretly practiced, taught by Mrs John Tan during our lunch break. The next day we left for Frankfurt Airport to depart for Singapore.



### **My personal reflection:**

I will always remember this beautiful country, so many beautiful magnificent castles, churches, museums and their historical background. Throughout the *Great Tour of the footprints of Dr. Martin Luther*, I have learned and understood the great works and the persecution that Martin Luther had gone through during his time for reformation. *I am proud to be a Lutheran.* It is an eye-opener for me. Now, I will always cherish and remember the Reformation Day celebrated by LCS At MEW, I greatly admire their love and the extensive works being done to outreach to Asia and Papua New Guinea and their own town in Neuendettelsau (N'au)

The extensive Women's Work in MEW, Deaconesses in Neuendettelsau Sisters of the Castellar Ring in Erfurt for their love and their commitment towards the Women's Work and the outreach to the needy, poor and disabled.

I greatly appreciate Reverend Thomas Paulsteiner and Rev. Ulrike Hansen for their guidance and being our interpreter throughout our stay and especially their hospitality inviting us to their home for dinner and fellowship.

Thank you MEW for being our hosts and conducting such a comprehensive, study tour for our sisters in LCS. This is a tour I will never forget a "*once a life-time tour*". I thank LCS for making this trip possible for the Sisters Fellowship.

I had a great time and fellowship, getting to know our sisters from the different congregations in LCS and all the great people in MEW & N'au. Most of all, I thank God for His provision and blessing to us sisters in LCS for such a blessed trip. All Glory unto God.

**Lucy Tan**