



## Jurong Christian Church

The Vine Committee

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## Editor's Word

Did you miss the last few issues of The Vine? Bro John Lee mentioned to me that some people have asked about the disappearance of The Vine for some time. Don't know whether he is making it up to spur me on to writing and producing The Vine once again. In the last couple of months, I have been struggling to wear the Treasurer's hat because it is too big for me. Even up to this moment as I pen down these thoughts, the accounts are still in limbo, not audited yet. Pray that it will be ready before the AGM.

Many of my fellow councilmen and some of you have asked me the million dollar question, "Do we have enough money for this or that?" If I was Mr Obama, I would have this billion dollar rescue plan for you. However because I don't think I am God's chosen one for this post, I am finding that the collection is dropping in this economic crisis while the expenses remain the same or even going up.

This is a time of economic famine and the old man has said that it would take 2 to 3 years for Singapore to recover. Does this make your hearts melt with fear? The Jews were fearful when they heard the report of the 10 spies. Yet when we look around, a church in the city managed to raise \$19 million in a single Sunday. Doesn't the economic famine affect them also? Psalm 37:18-19 records, "*The days of the blameless are known to the LORD, and their inheritance will endure forever. In times of disaster they will not wither; in days of famine they will enjoy plenty.*"

Week after week, the Youths remind us of the Church Rebuilding Fund. Do we watch in bemusement and do our own mental

calculations, \$1520 after 4 weeks will mean that it will take 50 years to get \$1 million. By then the lease on the land will be over. Doesn't it move you to want to take up the challenge to raise \$2 million by the end of 2 years so that the first phase of the rebuilding can be started? How can this be done with only a 200-strong membership? We have 104 weeks? If each person were to put in the Rebuilding Fund \$97 for each of the 104 weeks, we can achieve it. I admit it may be tough for some but for others, it is peanuts. So those who have more give more and it will balance off by God's grace.

Don't say to yourself I will leave my money in the bank to gather interest. Apparently, there is some move by the banks to charge its customers for placing money with them for safekeeping. When that happens, you will be losing money as you keep it in the bank. Besides, how safe is your money in the bank? Rust and moths and thieves break in to steal.

So let us start a **"2 by 2"** Project, ie \$2 million by 2 years time in tandem with the \$1 dollar Project. I tell you the truth, if you have faith as small as a mustard seed, God can work through you.

Does any young couple rationalize when they buy their first home; there are only 2 of us, so let us buy a 3-room flat? It is more than enough. When we have a child or two then we upgrade to a 4- or 5-room flat. Many will just go for the 5-room flat in preparation for that 2 children to come. So, don't say that there are only 200 of us, but rather open your eyes and look at the fields! They are ripe for harvest.

*Martin Cheah*

*Do you have a call to write - to share your testimony, your story - of healing, deliverance, salvation or miracles? Or is there an eye-witness incident that you want to recount? A written story is a powerful tool that God can use to touch the lives of many.*

Every morning is the dawn of a new error.

# Leading a Small Church

by John Koessler

An excerpt from an interview with John Koessler, who is chair and professor of pastoral studies at Moody Bible Institute. He previously spent nine years pastoring a small church in central Illinois.

## **What are two or three defining characteristics of the healthy small church in the 21st century?**

One mark of a healthy church is a biblical sense of mission. It's particularly important for the small church to get its marching orders from Scripture, and not from the culture, particularly since the culture seems to focus on the large church. The Bible describes the church as a community of the Word, a community that worships, a community that demonstrates mutual concern and ministry, and a community that bears witness to the surrounding world.

A second mark of health would be a biblically informed sense of realism, because I think there are too many small churches laboring under the burden of false expectations. We approach ministry under the assumption that the small church is really just an underdeveloped large church, instead of seeing it as a distinct expression of the body of Christ. We really can't do all the things that the large church is doing, so we create a climate for failure and that failure creates a culture of defeatism. The mantra you often hear in a small church is, "We're just a small church."

A third mark of health is a more holistic sense of what constitutes church growth. Numerical growth is one dimension, but it's only one, although it's an important one. But there are other important measures. For example, I think the small church needs to ask questions about whether a congregation is growing in its understanding of God's Word. Do you see a growth in character among God's people? Are they developing their capacity for ministry?

## **How do you encourage the pastor or leader who feels his or her life calling is in the small church, meaning they may never lead a church with high attendance or a large budget?**

It's vital to remember that your value or your effectiveness as a pastor is not determined by the size of your church. We have come to believe that the bigger the church, the better the pastor, and I just don't see that as being true. Someone's

capacity to be a good shepherd or a skilled communicator of God's Word is really not a function of church size. There are a lot of pastors who are effective shepherds, they're good preachers, and they're in small churches.

**What is one common misstep that small-church pastors or leaders could avoid?**

It would be the temptation to wish for something "better." There's this sense of discontent, this sense of disappointment. I'll never forget the time I met one of the members of the church I pastored at the post office. After the prerequisite comments about the weather, she said, "I can tell God has been working in your life." Of course I wanted her affirmation, so I asked her to tell me what she had seen. "Oh, I don't know," she said. "Somehow before, it seemed as if we just weren't good enough for you." And I was really devastated by the truth of her comment. For a number of years, I had felt I had gifts that could be used in a larger context. I think the hidden agenda of my ministry was to try and transform the church into something that made me feel good about myself, and not necessarily something that was pleasing to God. I was grateful that God helped me to see that before I finished my time there and I was able to moderate that.

**What is one powerful role a small church can play, despite its limited resources, in a heavily populated area?**

Small churches really are like a family. In a heavily populated area, the small congregation has the potential to provide a face-to-face community in a context where the dominant social experience is one of being nameless and faceless. What you find in the metropolitan setting is that the small church has the potential to provide what I'd call a relational oasis in a desert of anonymity. That isn't without its challenges, however. It's very rare in the average small church for newcomers to walk in off the street, and because many small churches are hidden away in their neighborhoods, it's hard for them to impact the community.

This is also where the family dynamic can work against the church. If the congregation is comfortable, if they enjoy their relational network, they don't feel heavily motivated to move out into the community. This is where the pastor comes in, this is where the pastor can help remind the church of its responsibility to look outside of itself.

I was always taught to respect my elders, but it keeps getting harder to find one.

# Combined CELL CNY Fellowship

We Love Because GOD First LOVED Us.....

The key purposes of this Combined Chinese New Year Fellowship between the 2 cells of Bethany and Abundance are Sharing and Fellowshiping Together in Appreciation and Thankfulness.



The LOVE of GOD is extended to ALL and His Goodness and the Abundant Life He give to ALL who accept and receive His Grace and Mercy.

It is GOOD with the CNY Air of Newness and Freshness to Catch-up and Fellowship as a body of Christ. More so with the good spread of food shared and prepared for all.

With a timely reminder from the BIBLE FOOD message from Dr.Hanson Wong of KL Baptist Church that we should Go Green and consumed more vegetables and fiber as the BIBLE exhort us to eat wisely.

A Chinese New Year Message on Blessedness from the Pastor of New Creation church was also shown. Both the VCDs are available for all. ...Please see Tony or Peter if you want to borrow them.



The best dish must be from Peter's Nonya Chap Chye – Bethany Cell and Ewe Ewe's colorful minced Pork Tofu soup.

To one and all, thanks again for the Fellowship in the Name of Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ...

Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another and all the more as you see the Day approaching. (Hebrews 10:25)

*Tony Koh*

My wife and I had words, but I didn't get to use mine.

## **Evangelism for the Ordinary Church**

Just because your people don't like to evangelize doesn't mean they can't share their faith.

*Steve R. Bierly*

A few years ago while candidating, I looked at a number of profiles sent to me by congregations searching for a pastor. One question my denomination asks churches to answer on such profiles is, "Name two or three specific things you have done to evangelize your area in the past year."

My heart sank as I read responses such as, "We let the local Rotary Club use our fellowship hall once a month for its dinner meetings," and "Our Christmas Eve service is always advertised in the local paper." It seemed few congregations were excited and intentional about reaching their world for Jesus Christ.

I eventually found a congregation that said it was ready to evangelize, but I was in for a shock. The first year I pastored Cobblestone, I conducted a two-day evangelism seminar. Only three people attended. Though tempted to start sending out my resumé again, I decided to make the best of it, hoping someday the Lord would guide me to a healthy church that wanted to evangelize.

But as I was waiting, I got to know the people of Cobblestone. I discovered they were willing, even eager, to do evangelism. It just wasn't the sort of evangelism I originally had in mind.

### **Redefine "target group"**

The conferences I attended urged me to target a specific group (baby boomers, Gen X-ers, etc.) and gear up my congregation to reach it. The only problem was that our congregation was made up of various generations. Just which specific group were we called and equipped to reach?

I found out the people of Cobblestone had another target audience in mind. They were concerned about friends, co-workers, and family members (of whatever age and group) who didn't know the Lord. As long as we kept asking, "How can we reach those close to us with the gospel?" evangelism took place and unchurched people began joining Cobblestone.

### **Stop using the E-word**

For many, evangelism is what Billy Graham does when he preaches to stadiums full of seekers and thousands come forward. Nobody in my congregation felt he or she could do that.

To others, evangelism meant intruding into the lives of total strangers by handing out tracts at the mall or calling door-to-door or phoning a list of names. Nobody wanted to do that. People here in the Northeast value their privacy. To violate another's privacy is seen as a downright un-neighborly and uncivil act.

A year after my ill-fated evangelism seminar, I decided to try again.

I offered an evening on "How to Explain Christianity to Your Friends." I felt encouraged enough to offer another one on "How to Share Your Faith with People Who Think They Already Know It All." It seems the folks at Cobblestone are willing to be trained in evangelism—as long as we don't call it that.

### **Set a climate for sharing**

When I presented proposals for seeker-sensitive services, the response was, "Why can't the unchurched just accept us as we are? When we first came to this church, it took us a while to feel comfortable, but we stuck it out. They can, too!"

This response came not from stuck-in-the-mud, long-term members but from boomers and busters who had recently joined the church!

Even though we don't have a seeker service, I'm careful not to use theological jargon in my sermons and Bible studies. If I use terms unfamiliar to non-Christians, I define them. My illustrations are drawn from TV, movies, sports, and pop music.

I also wrote a little booklet explaining the basic truths of the faith in language easily understood by the people living in our area. These booklets are placed at strategic locations in our building.

Rather than telling shy, introverted people who don't have a great deal of biblical knowledge or theological training to lead their loved ones to Christ, I urge my congregation to invite their friends to become part of Cobblestone Church, where they can meet Christ. Our members invite friends not only to our Sunday morning services, but also to our social events.

After one of our church talent shows, in fact, we gained several new members. I had never thought of my Elvis, Bob Dylan, and cast of "Star Trek" impressions as evangelistic before, but the Lord used them nonetheless.

Members of Cobblestone feel comfortable inviting others to our services because they know their friends will get something out of it. And I have had to replenish our supply of booklets quite often.

### **Work to reduce conflict**

Visitors can sense when something's not right. If they do, rarely will they come back.

My early teaching at Cobblestone stressed the church as a fellowship where love, acceptance, forgiveness, and patience are practiced. I tried to practice what I preached in dealing with difficult people. When arguments broke out at board meetings, I reminded everyone that this wasn't the way the church conducted business.

As a result, the atmosphere has greatly improved; visitors almost always characterize us as a "warm, friendly congregation." I came to see that time spent working on reducing tension is really time spent on church growth.

### **Get people to pray**

Will God really cause a church to grow just because people ask him to—even if that church does not have an aggressive evangelism program? At Cobblestone, he has. We continually get visitors who say, "We just felt that it was finally time to check out church and for some reason we were drawn here."

When my daughter, Abigail, was three-and-a-half years old, she asked her mother why she couldn't have a Sunday school class with kids her own age. My wife explained there weren't any children her age in the church and suggested that she pray for some. Abigail began to pray confidently for more kids. New families started coming that summer and by fall, she had her class—with eight students! Although pastors often hear "Everything depends on leadership," in reality, "Everything depends on God." If you can get some of your people to pray seriously and faithfully for growth, you've done a lot!

Steve R. Bierly is pastor of Cobblestone Church in Schenectady, New York.

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# *Ushering in Chinese New Year with Hope*

The Chinese have a belief in the luck of numbers. It is said that certain numbers are considered auspicious (吉利) while others are the opposite. Actually, the Chinese are quite a creative people with numbers; they can even turn inauspicious numbers into auspicious ones by playing with the sounds of the words for the numbers in their greetings. In this way, every year can be turned into an auspicious year as everyone would wish for:

Year 00 (e.g. 2000)	祝你百事享通，千事吉祥	May you enjoy all things, with plenty of good luck
Year 01	祝你一帆风顺	Wish for a smooth-sailing year
Year 02	祝你二龙腾飞	May you soar in your career or aspirations
Year 03	祝你三羊开泰	Wishing you peace and happiness
Year 04	祝你四季平安	Safe and sound in all seasons
Year 05	祝你五福临门	Fortune descends upon the house
Year 06	祝你六六大顺	Everything as planned (Your wishes come true)
Year 07	祝你七星高照	Lucky stars shining bright
Year 08	祝你八方来财	Wealth comes to you from all directions
Year 09	祝你九九同心	May you enjoy harmony in relationships
Year 10	祝你十全十美	A perfect year to you

How nice it would be if every year is makeable into an auspicious one by simple number-play in expressing our wishes. Unfortunately, this is not to be. In the year gone by (2008), much was made about the number 8

symbolizing prosperity. Alas, that year turned out to be an awful year of stock market crash, banking crisis, economic recession and depleted fortunes! Instead of 八方来财<sup>1</sup>, we were forced to stare at the unleashing of 八方风雨<sup>2</sup> with no abatement in sight even as we stepped into 2009. 财源滚滚<sup>3</sup> has been replaced by 裁员滚滚<sup>4</sup>; instead of 招财进宝<sup>5</sup>, people are being retrenched and struggling to put food on the table (遭裁禁饱).

How will 2009 progress? The stock-market bounce at the beginning of the year gave hope of a positive turning point. Unfortunately, it lasted only a moment. The good wish of 二零零九年，祝你好运久久<sup>6</sup> is yet to be tested. For those who have made huge paper losses in the stock market, it may be their hope of recovery as the bull comes charging in. Unfortunately again, the bull is not yet seen charging but, perhaps, taking its time to make its leisurely entrance in the Year of the Ox; and before it can put its feet firmly on the ground, the Tiger will come running in to chase it away one year from now – i.e., on 14<sup>th</sup> Feb 2010 (Year of the Tiger).

I am not making any prediction. It is anybody's guess what an Ox-picious year is going to be like. Just as people can put good-luck connotations into year numbers, it is also par for the course for the Chinese to put good tidings into every zodiac animal that represents a particular year, with the Rat (Year 2008) starting a 12-year cycle of good luck and prosperity while the Pig (Year 2019) will bring the cycle to its closing; then the Rat will come back to resume the cycle. One cycle after another, and it is everyone's hope for 好运久久<sup>7</sup> regardless of the year number.

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<sup>1</sup> Wealth flowing from all directions

<sup>2</sup> Bad weather everywhere

<sup>3</sup> Riches rolling in freely

<sup>4</sup> Increasing retrenchments

<sup>5</sup> Raising money and valuables

<sup>6</sup> good wish for enduring good luck in 2009

<sup>7</sup> Enduring good luck

What have all the above about numbers and zodiac got to do with us as Christians? Nothing! Luck and horoscopes are not part of the Christian worldview, but they are in our midst within the Chinese culture as we usher in the Chinese New Year. We know that in all things God works for the good of those who love Him. While not all things in themselves are good in human perceptions, they (the “good” and “bad”) will work out for the good of those who have been called according to God’s purpose. (*Rf* Rom 8:28) The Christian hope is founded not on the luck of numbers or horoscope signs (which are evidently unreliable), but is a hope of the Godly founded in Christ – with joy, and is patient in affliction and faithful in prayer, for the praise of God’s glory. (Rom 12:12; Eph 1:12) Note the following:

- It is dissimilar to the hope of the godless, who has no hope in God (Job 27:8)
- The needy will not always be forgotten, nor the hope of the afflicted ever perish. (Ps 9:18)
- The hope that is in God will never be put to shame. (Ps 25:3)

As we usher in 2009, may God bless us with His lasting blessings and make us glad with the joy of His presence. 祈求主祝福我们长长久久，又使我们在祂面前欢喜快乐。

John Lee

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## A LITTLE TESTIMONY

Big churches have spectacular testimonies and small churches have little testimonies but I would like to thank God nonetheless.

On Saturday, 28 March 2009, I started my car and drove my daughter to church for her dance practice. All was fine. I left her at church and proceeded to the petrol station. After paying for the petrol (the price is going up again), I went out to the car and to my horror, could not start it. I was in a panic. Here I am at the petrol pump but could not move off.

I called the agent who sold me the car and she asked me if I needed a tow truck to pick me up. I looked around and I notice that the petrol station had a service workshop which was still open. I went over and asked for some help. A service man came over and looked and determined that the problem was the battery. It had gone flat. After changing the battery (for \$133), I was able to drive home.

What to thank God for? I thank God that it happened at a place where I could find help easily and not in the middle of a highway or at a basement carpark or some “ulu” place.

*Martin Cheah*

## *Avoiding Towers of Babel in our Life*

When I was a little boy in the 1960's, I lived in Queenstown. The tallest building in Singapore then was a 14-storey block of red-brick flats (Forfar House) nearby. Not far away was a 10-storey building in Queensway. Those were well-known landmarks at that time (familiarily referred to as the 14-storey building and the 10-storey building respectively), at least by virtue of their distinguished heights. Nobody would imagine the sight of any residential building much taller. However, as years went by, necessity (shortage of land) would dictate the construction of taller and taller HDB buildings to accommodate an increasing population. Now, HDB and private residential skyscrapers are everywhere and no longer a wonder.

At that time, (one of) the tallest office block(s) in Singapore was the Bank of China Building at Battery Road. I believe that it just happened to be so and not because of any intention of its owner or architect to vie for status. However, building taller and taller became the norm as time went by; so in 1976, International Plaza (at Anson Road, combining offices and residences) and OCBC Centre (at Chulia Street) came into existence – no longer surprising. To generate the “WOW” sensation, property developers jumped at the challenge and gratification to erect yet taller buildings to show off their supremacy. In 1986, OUB Centre came onto the scene to earn the title of TALLEST BUILDING OUTSIDE THE UNITED STATES. This was followed by an equally tall OUB Centre at Raffles Place and thereafter, by Republic Plaza. The sky became the limit in challenges to build taller and taller.

Did building taller and taller skyscrapers grow from its humble beginning (say, out of need due to space constraints) to become a source of human pride and gratification to be one up against the competition? The rises of the Bank of China Tower in Hong Kong (1990), Shun Hing Square in Shenzhen (China, 1996), Petronas Towers in Malaysia (1998) and Taipei 101 in Taiwan (2004) one after another where land is not really scarce – each of these taller than the preceding tower, “dwarfing” the tallest skyscraper in the United States – spoke volumes about the increasing yen for heights for their own sake.

If skyscraper height is simply a matter of occurrence and not purposed in any way linked to vanity, then all the arguments about ranking criteria – whether the height should be reckoned to the highest point of the roof, whether any attached objects like spire or antenna should be considered, etc. – should be redundant.

The craving for height, and its accompanying honour, extends to non-building structures. The Ferris wheel is one example. It used to be that a Ferris wheel was of modest height for the entertainment of children in amusement parks. Now, it is no longer so, but with the grand ambition of raising international attention and raking in tourist dollars. Hence, the Singapore Flyer (2008), though not quite scraping the sky, boasts of being the tallest Observation Wheel (for added observational enjoyment rather than being a down-to-earth Ferris) in the world. This Flyer (the name, a misnomer; since it does not actually fly) takes the competition on height to a new level. Before it, the Star of Nanchang (2006, in Jiangxi Province, China) beat the London Eye (1999) for height. It was with a bit of fortuity that Singapore “won” the height competition this time round because China abandoned its earlier Shanghai Star Ferris Wheel project. If that project had proceeded, the Wheel would be taller than our Flyer.

Singapore can maintain its pride of height (or height of pride) regarding the tallest Observation Wheel for a little while. Challenges are in the offing: The Baghdad Eye and the Great Dubai Wheel (both at least 20m taller) are anticipated. The Great Berlin Wheel and the Beijing Great Wheel (both also at least 20m taller than the Flyer) are in the works too, and may well be completed this year!

It is a tad humorous that when one country banks on a casino business, some other countries would attempt to follow with fervour for competition; when some builders put up their towers for the world to see, others one after another jump on the bandwagon to demonstrate their prowess to equal the feat or go one step higher; when a new Ferris wheel arouses interest, the interest grows quickly for more competition to rise up. The spirit of competition for one-upmanship is very much alive in the human race. Is such competition good – to build self-esteem; to challenge the human spirit to advance in knowledge, skill or enterprise; to add spice

to life? **Would the culture of a competitive world reveal the vanity and emptiness of it all, when every satisfaction is short-lived as ever higher goals are superseded quickly?** Could this be good for the soul?

I was driven to the above thoughts when I returned to the Bible this year to re-read it from the Book of Genesis. I came across this passage on the Tower of Babel. (Gen. 11:1-9) In the beginning (after the Great Flood), the nations descending from Noah spread out over the earth. There was harmony and a common purpose for the clans of Noah's sons to settle down where they wanted to. There was good co-operation (instead of competition) when they applied their skills together to make bricks. Alas, pride soon reared its ugly head! Instead of just building houses to meet needs, they decided to build a skyscraper (a tall tower reaching to the heavens). For what? Well, to build a name for themselves and to avoid being scattered! God knew that the tower they wanted to build would become a monument to their own feats and draw them away from Him. Instead of putting their unity to good use for the honour of God, they sought after their own glory. The original wish of the people to have a city with its tower of pride was dealt a death knell. By God's intervention, the tower-building<sup>8</sup> could not proceed, and the genesis of scattered nations with a confounding variety of languages could be traced to the sin of human hubris. **What the people wanted to avoid (being scattered) became what they actually ended up with, and a lofty pride thus collapsed down to earth!**

The city of Babel got to the bad ending not because it did not have a good start. God did bless the post-Flood people with great skills to use brick for stone and tar for mortar and, most important of all, a united purpose to build a city in a conducive plain, with the great facility of working together with one language and a common speech. (Gen. 11:1) The unity was good, but put to bad use. In other words, even today, God's good blessings can be misappropriated for ignoble purposes whereby God is forced to act to bring people to their senses.

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<sup>8</sup> According to an ancient Jewish text, the tower was very huge and was forty-plus years in the making when stopped. This shows the magnitude of human hubris.

The Babel story was not to be the one-and-only case of God scattering His people. The scattering of Israel (Deut. 4:27) is believed to have taken place three times (destruction of 10 tribes in 721 B.C.; 570 B.C. with the destruction of Judah by the Babylonians; A.D. 70 when Jerusalem was destroyed by Rome) In a way, in the modern world, the ease of global travel and the push-and-pull forces wrought by the conditions of human societies and the hubristic nature of man are greatly contributory to increasing international migrations which makes it harder for any people to hold down a city (or nation) for community stability and continuity.

If nations can be scattered, likewise can they be gathered. (Zeph 3:8). Momentous changes have taken place in the world within this generation and they show no signs of abating. The scattering or gathering, for good or bad as you may prayerfully contemplate from your reading of Scripture, points to one truth. Whether united in purpose (hoping so) as in United Nations or as in people groups of individual tribes and nations, it is paramount for the unity to be for good use. It is alright for stakeholders to share a single-minded intent for any construction, but if good intent becomes superimposed by vain glory, with excesses (of opulence, for example) far beyond the primary object of the work, then the resulting edifice would be like a tower of Babel for which a good start comes to a sorry end; Do you build towers of Babel in your life; i.e., hubristic towers



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instead of objects for their real good use not for the sake of human glory? If so, it is time to stop.

John Lee

# DIALECT MINISTRY - PHOTO NEWS

Many things have happened over the last few months but only these few have been captured on camera.



During the Chinese New Year season, the Dialect Ministry visited a number of homes to do CNY caroling and bring cheer to the old folks.



Dialect Ministry conducted their first Holy Communion service on 1<sup>st</sup> Feb 2009. A simple ceremony with the participants gathering around a small table, which holds the bread and wine.



Laura's mother, Mdm Chan Peck Huay, passed away on 24<sup>th</sup> March 2009. The Dialect Ministry was there to support her with some songs of hope and peace amidst the Buddhist ceremony.



I noticed a young Buddhist monk observing and listening to the singing. Let's hope he wasn't turned off by our noisy chatter while he was saying the prayers.