



The Vine Committee

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HOM'S REFLECTIONS

There are 3 reasons why I am not in the council. I have been in the council 3 times and each time, one pastor leaves. On my first tour of duty, Pastor Michael left, on my second tour, Pastor Fredric left and during my last tour of duty, Rev. William left. Was it my body odour? My reappearance in the council is not reassuring to the pastors' continuity of service in JCC. Some say that LCS plays a musical chairs system. In this case, the music has not yet stopped but when I am in the council, the music stops.

Secondly, my role in the council was always as Treasurer. It is sad when a church is not blessed with talented people who have the right qualifications to hold the right positions. There is such a short supply of qualified and practising accountants in our midst that we have to turn to a person who is not qualified and have not practised accountancy for the last 25 years to consider taking up the position in the council. I know some think that accountancy is a stagnant subject of debits and credits and anyone with a LCCI certificate can do it. So why do the big companies need someone with an Accounting degree to be an accountant?

Lastly, I am not a natural born leader type. In my workplace, I have no one reporting to me unlike many of you who may have 10 or more subordinates reporting to you. If my boss wants something done, I have to do it myself. As a cell group leader, the position dropped on me like a bomb. As a HOM, I am in charge of the lowest priority ministry of JCC, which can be closed if I am reassigned, without being missed.

Is it God's Will that the weak are chosen to shame the strong? 1Corinthians 1:27-29, *"But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things--*

and the things that are not--to nullify the things that are, so that no one may boast before him."

If we truly believe this, then we must have more confidence that the new JCC will be rebuilt by a small, weak body of Christians because this is to God's glory so that no one may boast.

Can we see God's hidden hand in the whole rebuilding process? Is it surprising to find ourselves planning to share the same temporary premises with Calvary BP Church, our nearest neighbour, which we have had no dealings with since Pastor Kusserow's time?



In the Today paper of 1st March, there was a report of how a church's restoration brought about reconciliation between two peoples (Greek and Turkish Cypriots) who had been separated for decades. Do you see the possibility of JCC and Calvary collaborating and giving glory to God through this rebuilding event.

Then there is the situation of 3 or more churches in one building, the new JCC, possibly in answer to Jesus prayer in John 17:20-21, *"My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that **all of them may be one**, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me.."*

With a new and bigger church on the way, the accounts will be more complex, with tenants and other external parties involved. Do we need a more qualified person as Treasurer?

"Bring the best of the firstfruits of your soil to the house of the LORD your God." Exodus 23:19

Do we dare provide an unqualified, leadership-challenged guy? Wouldn't you choose someone younger, qualified and even pretty like Serena?

Martin Cheah

PPG Celebrating First Anniversary

JCC Parents' Prayer Group



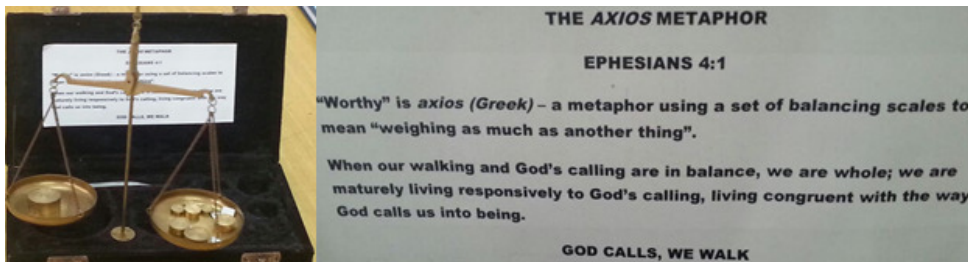
Which parent does not love his/her children?

It is for love of their children that some parents in JCC decided to start a Parents' Prayer Group in JCC, with its inaugural meeting on 17th March 2013. It has been a blessed one year of the fellowship of parents who regularly get together fortnightly at 9.00 a.m. on

Sundays for about 1½ hours of sharing prayers and encouragements as they walk through the challenging journey of parenting. In the eyes of parents, even if children are no longer as young as infants or toddlers but have become grown-ups to be parents themselves, they are still children whom their parents care and love very much.

At present, there are more than 10 parents in this PPG, led by our brother Wong Mui.

Here is one encouraging sharing by bro. Wong Mui on the AXIOS METAPHOR. To make sure that he could make himself understood, he even produced an actual balancing scale (as shown in the picture) to explain the concept. How enthusiastic of him!



“Eph. 4:1 is the Scripture verse that we draw inspiration for this metaphor: ‘As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life **worthy** [*axios*] of the **calling** you have received.’

“The Greek word ‘*axios*’ is translated as ‘worthy’. The word ‘*axios*’ functions as a metaphor like a set of balancing scales. You place a known weight, say lead, on one pan, and then put another item, say, flour on the other pan. When the pans are in balance, they are in equilibrium. The two items – lead and flour – are *axios*. They have the same weight as each other. They are worthy.

“The items on the scales in the book of Ephesians are God’s calling and our lives or walk. When our walk and God’s call are in equilibrium, we are whole; we are living maturely, living responsively to the voice of God, living congruent with God’s desire for us as human beings. Our lives are thus worthy of God’s calling.

“Ephesians 4:1 is the pivot of the book of Ephesians. Chapters 1 -3 deals with the call of God. Chapters 4-6 talk about our walk. Before we talk about how we should live, we need to hear the call of God.

“When a slight movement of air hits the balance, the beam begins to move. At times, we are faced with situations where our obedience to God may be compromised. The voices of the world keep blasting at our ears. These voices can be very subtle at times, adulterating the truth and authority of God. Do we have the wisdom of discernment? We hear the Spirit of God speaking to us in a still small voice, reminding us the Word of God. We can choose to obey God or our human desires. When the beam stops moving, does it tilt towards the Call of God (which means that we have fallen short of His calling) or remain approximately in equilibrium (which means that our life is still worthy of God’s calling)?”

Phillip Jensen, author of the book “Parenting: it never ends” wrote: “Once a parent always a parent. We may not go on changing nappies or bearing financial responsibility, but a parent's concern never ceases.”

Therefore, in a sense, parents are captive to their calling for good. Apostle Paul’s counsel for the Ephesians to live [walk] a life worthy of the calling was despite struggles and pain, just like he himself was suffering afflictions as “a prisoner for the Lord”.

As I reflect on what bro. Wong Mui shared, I derived a further inspiration from the metaphor.

In the context of parenting, parents are in a sense captive to their calling for good. The heavy burden is very much felt, or visible. However, God does understand the pain, just like He understood the anguish of Apostle Paul. Eph. 4:7 says, “**But** to each one of us grace has been given as Christ **apportioned** it.”

Whereas to walk in balance with the weight of the calling is not ordinarily a pleasant experience, the conjunction “**But**” introduces a counterbalancing complement to soothe. If Christ set the standard for us and have our life-versus-calling standing assessed by the balancing scale, we are given comfort with the fact that He also bestows grace, and this grace is **apportioned** to each one of us. The word “**apportioned**” also suggests a balancing allocation, to each an amount as appropriate. I personally visualise a balancing scale (in a metaphorical sense) where the weight of the calling presses down on one pan while God’s sustaining grace enables us to steady our walk in balance so that we do not tip over.

A *Less-chim*¹ sharing on the Money Plant

If you find that the AXIOS METAPHOR is too tough to chew, you may like Peggy Tan’s simple sharing about her Money Plant during one of the PPG’s meetings:

“One day, my colleague gave me a stalk of Money Plant with 12 leaves. Not being a person with green fingers, I did not know much about taking care of it. I proceeded to cut it into halves, each with 6 leaves.

“So I had two Money Plants in two trays containing water. I kept my fingers crossed that the plants would grow.



more sunshine.

“I admired the plants day after day and ensured that they had sunlight and water. Every Saturday, I would give the plant a “treat” of being placed on the window ledge to bask in

¹ *Chim* – a Hokkien or Teochew word that means “deep, hard to understand.”



“To my surprise, one of Money Plants weakened day by day while the other kept growing healthily with more leaves added.

“As I looked at the Money Plants with different lives (one evergreen and the other fading), I thought about how the lives of people share similar dichotomous outcomes despite being placed in the same environment.

“As I admired the healthy plant, standing upright with leaves increased from six to eight, I told myself that my Christian life should be like it. If my constant walk with the Lord is right, I would be standing upright and growing, bearing new leaves.

“Jesus said, ‘I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.’” (John 15:5)

“Is my life rooted in Christ who promises me rich blessings, like the flourishing Money Plant soaking up nutrients and absorbing sunlight; or is it like the other Money Plant, fading off because it chooses to pass over nourishment available to it?



Indeed, the healthy Money Plant has sprouted more luxuriant leaves – what a beauty to behold!

A VIP Invitation

As PPG celebrates its first anniversary this month, all VIPs (Very Important Parents) are invited to come on board to share and receive blessings as we travel in calm waters or across high waves on our parenting journey together. It is our prayers for ourselves that we as parents catch the wind of the AXIOS METAPHOR in living our lives worthy of our calling, and for our children that God will graciously bless them to grow like the healthy Money Plant.

In the PPG, we have parents of various descriptions: “bright and breezy”, “thoughtful sharer of wisdom “(like our bro. Wong Mui☺), “easy-going storyteller with soft messages to bless everyone” (like our sis. Peggy Tan☺) and more. In short, we have all kinds of interesting characters and you should never find yourself out of place.

If you are not already an interesting part of the PPG, will you accept this invitation to be one?

JOHN LEE

REBUILDING COMMITTEES are at work round the clock, planning, negotiating, designing and raising funds.

It is time to move and maybe it is not too early to start packing. The GB has started packing their stuff and soon the English Library will also have to start.



Where do we put the stuff and books for the next two years? Ideally we can find members willing to store at least one box of books for the library.

After 2 years you will be a very well read person. Help us and help yourselves.



Lend us some free space to store the library books.



Martin Cheah

UNCONDITIONAL LOVE

Is there such a thing called “unconditional love”?

I heard that this question was discussed at the DE class on 12th February. It seems that it was a great question that elicited interesting answers, the best of which was one humorously proffered – “an unconditional love is love with no condition attached.” ☺ ☺

Ps Andrew did pose the question “What is unconditional love” on WhatsApp prior to the DE class for brothers and sisters to contemplate. Therefore, although I was not present in the DE class, I benefited from the opportunity granted by Ps Andrew to ponder the question, and here I share my thoughts with you.

Not the “most-correct” answer

What I share is just a piece of my mind and not to be taken as the “most correct” answer. If you have attended the DE class, I welcome you to share with Vine readers your understanding based on the diverse perspectives you might have picked up from fellow classmates. Certainly, your sharing will benefit all readers of the Vine and I may get some extra useful insight from what I missed out. As I usually tell people, I usually derive much inspiration to write from the sharings by brothers and sisters-in-Christ.

Meanings to be bothered with

There are two meanings of the word “condition” that we have to deal with:

1. Condition is a state one is in. For example, a child is sickly. So the sickliness is a condition or state. Do his parents love him despite his condition?

“Unconditional” – regardless of the state one is in.

2. Condition is an imposed requirement. For example, a mother tells his son, “I will buy you a gift on the condition that you pass your examination.”

“Unconditional” – without any condition imposed.

I feel that as we contemplate whether there is unconditional love or not, we have to consider the two meanings.

Instinctive unconditional love exists



A mother loves her child as she should because it is her flesh and blood. Even if the child is born with blemishes, I can't think of any mother who willingly gives birth to it not loving it. The love is simply maternal instinct rather than a deliberated response. Correspondingly, there is a paternal instinct that drives a father's love for his child.

Cases of parents ill-treating their children are exceptions of cruelty or "no love"; this presence of cruelty is not hard to imagine as, in life, atypical occurrences cannot be absolutely non-existent. However, mostly, the maternal and paternal instincts to love whatever the condition (meaning #1 above) are not easy to thwart. Even cases of mothers harming their children do not necessarily indicate lack of love. There is a distinction between love (which is present) and the "fully wrongful" acts (like harming) or "questionable acts" (like giving up the babies) which might be precipitated by distress, mental derangement or careful (or misplaced) considerations of the perceived interest of the children.

I am not thinking that there are parents who do not love their children, but that these are in the rarity. **I am saying that despite the existence of "unloving cases", unconditional love ("condition" meaning #1) does exist by instinct.**

Distinguishing LOVE and ACTION

Let's look at the example of a mother who is very unhappy with her child for the latter's behavior. In her heart, she feels pain regardless of whatever action she takes, such as curtailing of benefits, or direct action to intervene in the child's behavior. Where does the pain arise from if love is absent? Instead, from the pain rises perseverance upon the hope that the child will turn over a new leaf. There arises also the setting of conditions (meaning #2) in the expectation that such conditions would guide the behavior onto the right track. The actions may not be best advised, and the failure of the child in meeting the conditions set increases the pain in the mother's heart springing from the ever-present maternal instinct. A distinction has to be made between the LOVE (which is unconditionally present and wreaking unrelenting pain) and the CONDITIONALITY (meaning #2) that comes from the LOVE but is not the basis of it. **In this vein, I see a positive connection between God's love and the demands that He places on man (e.g. "Thou shalt not ...").**

Rom. 5:8 tells us that “God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” (ESV) This love is unconditional by meaning #1 (regardless of the state – of sinfulness – we are in). However, since love does not rejoice in wrongdoing, God has to mete out appropriate actions out of love. The conditionality (meaning #2) that arises is NOT indicative of a withdrawal of love.

John 3:16 says that “God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.” Love is given first, then the prerequisite of a belief in order to gain salvation. I see this prerequisite not as a condition for the love; rather, a condition exuding from the love and for the gift of eternal life.

Consider a human example: A father loves his child and all his acts towards the child spring naturally from the love. One day, the father in his old age tells the child, “Now, work hard in the field. All that is mine is going to be yours, including this big house.” Sadly, the child becomes delinquent, taking to drugs, drinking and gambling. In his wrath, the father decided to bequeath his estate to charity instead of to the child. Yet, the love with pain is ever present, with hope that the prodigal child will turn back. There is love, and there is the act of gifting his property. The two are not one, whether they are joined or severed. The father’s love is unconditional, but the response of the child to the love freely given has its consequences.

God loves us. He gives His Son’s life for us. He extends His welcoming hand for us to receive His gift of eternal life. However, if we do not believe that there is such a good Father and such a good love gift of eternal life, would we extend our hands to meet God’s hand to receive the gift? If we fail to do so, because of unbelief, it is not God withdrawing His unconditional love; but it is we who are drawing ourselves away from the Father!

Unconditional Love in marriage

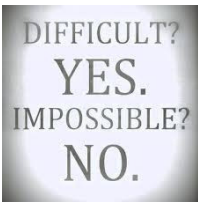
As regards married couples, my understanding is that when one says to the other “I take you as my wife/husband ... for better or worse ... until death do us part,” the beginning statement in the vow is an undertaking of accepting the life partner for what he/she is at that point (condition – meaning #1), and the “unconditional love” that follows after the nuptial refers to love continuing no matter how



<http://www.tnp.sg/content/60-years-they-still-hold-hands>

the condition (meaning #1) develops and what conditionality (meaning #2) shows up in the couple's relationship due to circumstances. We do hear stories of life-long devotion between man and wife; there may be tiffs, shortcomings in characters and deficiencies in acts that, by human perception, do not measure up to professed unconditional love, but there are many reasons for such human failings. (Spirit willing but flesh is weak. 心有余力而不足。) Love is primarily of the heart, while actions are shaped by the mind. The two may be closely interconnected, but they do not necessarily meet perfectly because heart triggers and mind triggers work differently. **In brief, my contention is that a disappointment in action in the flesh (that seems at odds with loving) cannot be equated wholly with a lack of tenderness in the heart.**

“Difficult” does not mean “Impossible”



We all know that in our human fallen state, it is difficult to love unconditionally (both meanings #1 and #2) between persons not related by flesh and blood. However, this is not absolutely impossible with the help of God.

Just as pain is felt instinctively and not by choice, but can still be suppressed by forceful deliberateness, the instinct of love is not something that can be thwarted at will even though this can happen by exceptional effort.

The difficulty for the unconditional love between flesh and blood to be detached is similar to the difficulty for unconditional love to be infused into a relationship that is not flesh and blood. Correspondingly:

- The unconditional love between persons unrelated by flesh and blood is a scarcity (but not totally absent).
- The absence of unconditional love between flesh and blood is exceptional rather than normal.

While noting the saying that blood is thicker than water, I cannot assert that non-family ties that bind under whatever conditions (meaning #1) do not exist.

Unconditionally loving yourself

Have you ever come across people who tell you that they hate themselves for all kinds of reasons? (E.g., “I hate myself because I am so ugly!”☹)

The late Elisabeth Kubler-Ross (a Swiss American psychiatrist) said, “The ultimate lesson all of us have to learn is unconditional love, which includes not only others but ourselves as well.”

I like particularly this phrase “but ourselves as well”. If we can’t unconditionally love ourselves (pockmarks and all), how can we possibly think of attempting the rare feat of loving others (who are not our flesh and blood) unconditionally?

“Unconditional Love” vs. “agápē”



When Tom loves Mary, we don’t say “Tom is love.” However, when we say God demonstrates His own (*agápē*) love for us (Rom. 5:8), we also say “God is love (*agápē*)” (1 John 4:16). While *agápē* is commonly translated as “unconditional love”, it is just a translation. In customary usage of English, the term “unconditional love” carries a meaning that is not exactly *agápē* as it is applied to God’s love; for we can’t say “Tom is *agápē*” while we can say “God is *agápē*”. Consider the following:

- To answer the question “Is God’s love unconditional?” I would have to ask a further question, “What do you understand by “unconditional”?” So my answer can be YES or NO.
- To answer the question “Is God’s love agape?” I can without hesitation say, “YES, IT IS!”
- My answer to the question “Is there unconditional human love?” would be YES based on my enumeration above, but it is quite acceptable for others to give an answer of NO based on their perceptions of what “unconditional love” means to them. Their NO and my YES may actually not be in real conflict because in our minds we have different perceptions of “conditionality”.

Conclusion

There is popular opinion that love must be demonstrated by action. Nevertheless, it is not always noticeable-action that demonstrates love. Besides, tough actions on account of love are at times misread as meanness. In my humble opinion, humans are not always adept at demonstrating love to a fault. Therefore, to judge “unconditional love” on

the basis of outward actions or without clarity of what meaning is applied to the term can leave different impressions on different persons.

Unconditional love ≠ Unconditional (“condition” meaning #2) interactions in relationships.

JOHN LEE

NOAH – to watch or not?

A controversial Hollywood film supposedly based on a Biblical character – Noah, has hit town.

Having not watched the movie myself, I should not give my comments. However my daughter watched it in Brisbane and told us she was very disappointed with the way the movie has changed the Biblical story completely. She was so angry with the movie she advised us not to watch it.

A review of the movie on YouTube by a Christian organization gave some disturbing insights. One was the evolution of Adam and Eve from apes, another was the use of a magical snake skin, which was shed by the snake in the Garden and the character of Noah as an environmentalist who wanted to destroy humans so that the animals and plants can inhabit the earth.



No point in giving yourselves high blood pressure, avoid the movie. However, if your friends watched the movie and need some clarifications, please refer them to Genesis chapter 5 to 9 for the true version.

Martin Cheah

My journey through the Bible as a country

The book “A new journey with Jesus: Lenten meditations on the Acts of Jesus through the Spirit” by John Chong Ser Choon provides a very interesting perspective on the discipline of reading through the entire Bible yearly.

The author uses a framework to portray the Bible as a country that we can enter into and inhabit. The more we visit the country, the more we get to meet and understand the stories of the many people and characters and how God encountered them. Besides, the more we know the place, the better we will be able to “drive around” to see where God has been and where He is. Each of our annual visits humbles us as it reminds us how small our stories and our lives are when cast upon the skies of God’s eternal being. When we submit our lives to what we read in Scripture, we find that we are not being led to see God in our stories but our stories in God’s. God is the larger context and plot in which our stories find ourselves.

I imagine God’s creative world is like a big beautiful puzzle picture. I am a small piece of that big puzzle. There may be dull uneventful parts in my life but I hope to bloom and be the colorful parts of the puzzle pieces that bring glory to His name. Each piece of the puzzle is important and precious in His eyes and the picture is not complete without it.

Each child of God began a new journey and became new stories in God’s ongoing salvation story. The presence of the Holy Spirit is seen as the distinguishing mark of Christianity.

Have we bumped into God already? Has God shown up yet?

Lissa Low

DIALECT JOINT RETREAT



A full busload of members travelled all the way from Jurong to Yishun Christian Church on the afternoon of 1st March 2014.

Actually, it was much more than a full busload. 70 members went, but the bus could only take 52. The rest went there on their own.



It was the 1st LCS Dialect get-together organized by YCC and co-hosted by JCC, as first suggested by Pastor David Ng way back early last year. BLC and LCOR were also invited for this occasion.



Our bishop, Rt. Rev. Terry Kee, delivered a message in Hokkien, translated into Cantonese by a brother from YCC, on putting trust in God for our needs, and he did not miss out sharing about our JCC Rebuilding Project among several examples he cited of faith at work. He also called on members of the church to support the project.



We had singing. We had games. We had video presentations of past activities of the Dialect Ministries of YCC and JCC. Pictures speak better than words. From the pictures here, you can see that age is no barrier to enjoyment.



Finally, we also had food and gifts for everyone. A full busload of members returned from Yishun to Jurong with happy smiles. Oops! Actually, it was more than a full busload.



“When will the next retreat be planned?” This was a question some couldn’t wait to enquire.

Girls' Brigade Enrollment 2014



9th March – The Girls' Brigade had their annual enrollment service in JCC as usual except that this will be the last time the girls will be in this building. The excitement of being the last batch to be enrolled in the old building attracted many parents to join in the celebration.



The photos tell most of the story but here is a story which cannot be told by photos but from the heart of one of the GB girls.

I have been in Girls' Brigade (GB) for 3 years and this would be my last year in this CCA. It has always been a joy to attend GB meetings. In these meetings, devotions and Singspiration would be conducted, with lessons teaching us to be leaders and role models.



GB is a CCA which I enjoyed ever since I stepped through its gates. I feel secure and blessed by God during GB. Activities, competitions, challenges – we have all overcome it together as one company.



Enrolments in Jurong Christian Church made me feel proud as I walked past the GB flag and received my awards. During Enrolment performances, we sang like sweet angels. We marched like soldiers and stood in the sun like statues. We would never complain, instead, we completed our tasks one by one.



GB has made me proud, GB has made us proud. Together we stand, together we rise.

Girls' Brigade, I ♥ you!

Alice Lee 6B3



Building New JCC - the Noah story

In the Straits Times (Money section) of 5th April 2014, we find an article “Jurong Condo sales better than expected”. This is referring to the new condo that is coming up next to the Canadian school. The developer intended to launch 150 units but ended up selling 180 units. Imagine the 4-room penthouse units cost \$2.67 million.

When the idea of rebuilding JCC first came up, some were of the opinion that we are not growing fast enough, so there was no immediate need for more space. Did Noah think it strange that God asked him to build an Ark when there was no rain?

Even now many think the world will end soon, some even claim it will be in 2014. So why go to the trouble of rebuilding the church building? When Noah built the Ark, it was precisely because God was going to end the world at that time. The Ark was built to keep Noah and his family and the animals alive.

How did Noah get all the animals to enter the Ark? *Pairs of clean and unclean animals, of birds and of all creatures that move along the ground, male and female, **came to Noah** and entered the ark...* Genesis 7:8-9a
Contrary to most peoples’ assumption, Noah did not go out to catch the animals, they came.

So if we are wondering how to fill up the new and larger JCC, think of Noah’s experience. Read the news and wonder at the development plans for the Jurong Gateway and how many more people will be coming into this area. God is moving the people in, whether they be construction workers, medical tourists, fun seekers, office workers or new home owners.

Think of new JCC as the Ark that will bring many people through to the new heavens and new earth. What are we to do then?

Noah did everything just as God commanded him. Genesis 6:22

Martin Cheah

DIALECT MINISTRY 6TH ANNIVERSARY



The Dialect Ministry celebrated its 6th Anniversary on 30th March 2014. Bishop Kee gave the message and also presented Amazing Grace on a chinese musical instrument.

After the service there was a small buffet for all. The Dialect Leadership Team (DLT) took the opportunity to have a photo taken with Bishop Kee.



We have laboured 6 years and it seems to be just a short time. *Even youths grow tired and weary, and young men stumble and fall; but those who hope in the LORD will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and **not grow weary**...*Isaiah 40:30-31