

## An interview with Pastor Andrew Thinagaran



Looking back at May/June 2010 issue of The Vine, I saw a photo on the installation of Pastor Andrew Thinagaran. Has it been that long since he and his family joined the JCC family? How is someone whose

background is not Lutheran but felt the calling to join JCC, a Lutheran church, doing so far? I'm sure our curiosity is piqued so let's see if he has answered some of the burning questions in your minds!



**Alicia:** Some casual questions to kick off the interview! What do you enjoy doing in your spare time?

**Pastor Andrew:** In my spare time, I prepare sermons, DE materials, pray, bible study, bring the family out, play handphone games, badminton on Thursdays, watch television and make a fool of myself with my youngest daughter Tricia.

**Alicia:** I know you do not live in the west. Considering the long distance you and your family have to travel every Sunday, has everyone settled down well?

**Pastor Andrew:** No choice in the matter. Praise God, we have good public transport and now that I am driving (for another year), it is safer and easier. My children will face challenges as they join youth programs that are organised on days other than Sundays. My wife is unable to have stable fellowship as she works in the east, stays in the north and church is in the west. She makes up by joining the pastors' wives fellowship led by Bishop Terry's wife, Sally. My thanks to Sally for this.

**Alicia:** For those who are new to our church, can you share about your job as a pastor?

**Pastor Andrew:** Best job on the planet. Work and ministry synergised. Enabled to study God's word and be involved in the lives of members and Taman Jurong residents. Conformed to behave by expectations of everyone and transformed to grow in order to grow others. Can only survive by Christ's enabling and daily grace.

**Alicia:** What are the challenges you face as a pastor? What keeps you going despite it all?

**Pastor Andrew:** The greatest challenge I face daily is to die to self and live for Christ. The next challenge is to get leaders and members to see the goodness and greatness of God in Christ so that they may find true joy in the Lord. Naturally and by our orientation in Singapore, we are works, goal and achievement oriented. It is hard for us to enjoy God and be satisfied in Him, to allow God to work in and through us. I believe work-life balance comes as we in love submit to God first.

What keeps me going --- Christ! As the great missionary C.T Studd said, "If Jesus Christ be God and died for me, then no sacrifice can be too great for me to make for Him." I believe in the biblical worldview of the reality of death and resurrection in Christ. Life is only worth living because death makes life precious (make use of time wisely) and resurrection makes life worth living (God is the absolute truth in life and following his ways leads to abundant and eternal life).

**Alicia:** At the scale of 1-10, rate how busy you are now.

**Pastor Andrew:** When I joined full time ministry, my home church leader was concerned. She asked me, "Do you think there is enough work for you to do in fulltime ministry?" My answer then and now is the same. I am as busy as I want to be. I can choose to do the minimum expected of me and get by or I can initiate and open up new ministries and be very busy.

However, I do not judge my work by how busy I am but if I am doing God's work and in His strength and grace. In JCC, besides the usual pastoral work of preaching, prayer, teaching, home and hospital visitations, funeral and weddings services, attending various meetings, leading CG ministry with our CG Shepherds, etc., I use my technical skills to help in web and IT works for JCC, JCCK and now LCS.

Besides JCC, I am also chairman and board member of Singapore Bible College Alumni. In this capacity, I hold meetings, run events and alumni AGM. I try to keep my outside involvement to a minimum, accepting preaching invitations about 3-4 times a year.

Basically, I am an introvert. I prefer to be by myself. If I can play computer games all day long with breaks for food and toilet, I would be a very happy person. However, since I have known Christ, I believe in his mission to proclaim God's kingdom and to serve others as Christ served. I have chosen to do not what I like but what I believe.

**Alicia:** This question is by John Lee. What do you think about the denominational distinctives in theology from your background and Lutheran?

**Pastor Andrew:** People who stay in one denomination all their lives tend to grow deep and faithful to their own distinctive. People who cross denominations tend to have a broad view and acceptance of other church distinctive. Today there are no pure denominations in Singapore's context ... other than Roman Catholic Church. This is due to interdenominational seminaries (TTC and SBC), interdenominational events (Full Gospel Businessman Fellowship, LoveSingapore, crusades, etc.) and interdenominational Christian bookstores (Techman, SKS, etc.). As a result, we see in all churches, leaders and members who have mixed denominational experiences.

When I came into the Lutheran setup, I was a Bible-believing, Christ-centred Christian. Denominational distinctive I appreciated as giving form and structure. I still hold this view. However, as I have been helped by our Lutheran clergy to understand the Lutheran distinctive, Lutheran theology and Divine Liturgical Service, I have come to appreciate the value of all these. Today I would highly recommend Lutheran distinctive and all things Lutheran as a Biblical way of living the Christian life. To this extent, when I setup DE, originally the classes focused on general Christian life. Today, with the help of Rev. Martin Yee, we complement biblical studies with Lutheran distinctive lessons.

I appeal to our members to go beyond the basics of Christianity and to learn Lutheran distinctive so that we may practice our way of worship with understanding.

**Alicia:** What would you like to see in JCC in 5 years' time?

**Pastor Andrew:** Personal growth of self, leaders and members. Christianity is not an option. Church is not just other organisation. If done Biblically, these are God's means to life and salvation as well as God's means for social life and support. For this to be real, lives must be touched and transformed. By this I do not mean that we become better individuals but that we die to self and live for Christ. Just as our vision says, "Be Christ-like." This is what I wish to see happen; that Christ is formed in us and together with Paul we can declare, "I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me." (Gal 2:20)

Glory be to God in Christ and peace to all who trust and obey God in Christ.