
Metamorphosis of the church to face the 21st Century Challenges

Introduction



It has been 8 months since I participated in the LCS Pastors' Study Trip to Taiwan from 20th to 24th August 2018. Despite the passage of time, it is still vivid in mind the theme of our trip and the

valuable insight and learning we gained from the experience of the Lutheran Church in Taiwan in managing the tough challenges of Christian outreach in a country with predominantly non-Christian beliefs.

Through our learning/dialogue sessions with the lecturers from China Lutheran seminary at Hsinchu, followed by visitations to the churches, we were amazed at the wonderful works that God had prepared His churches to reach out to pre-believers.

Inspiration from CLBC

The Chinese Lutheran Brethren Church (CLBC) is in Hsinchu. Like many churches, the CLBC had a humble beginning as a missionary mission. Yet, today, it is the biggest church in Hsinchu, where the Science Park inspired by Silicon Valley is

located. There are also two universities. Hence, there is a significant population of professors, researchers, students, professionals and young families in this vibrant city.

One of the practices of CLBC is to send out pioneering teams to set up new churches, or to rebuild the “stagnant and dying” churches. It was heart-warming to hear the testimonies of church members who willingly and spontaneously pull themselves out of a comfortable and established church-setting to be pioneers of new churches, supported by a lot of prayers to embark on such a faith journey for church expansion beyond four walls.

Inspiration from Chupei Victory Church (竹北勝利堂)

The Chupei Victory Church in Chupei City (a few kilometres from Hsinchu City) is an example of a fruitful mission expansion work started by a team of pioneers from CLBC. We had a wonderful dialogue with the Elder who became the pastor of the church. Hearing their faith rebuilding plan, the struggles encountered, the limitation of manpower, and the financials needed, I was reminded of our own journey of rebuilding JCC. The mountain-size challenges did not deter their spirit in pursuing God’s agenda and His Mission that God laid upon the heart of the leadership and the members.

Inspiration from Shilin Truth Lutheran Church (士林真理堂) in Taipei

The last church we visited was Shilin Truth Lutheran Church in Taipei, the capital city of Taiwan which is an hour’s drive from



Hsinchu. There, we had an awesome session with the Lutheran Bishop Wu and church staff. The Bishop inspired us with his sharing of his heartfelt vision for the church, a vision founded upon years of toil with persistent efforts to reinvent themselves to adapt to changes in surrounding circumstances in order to be effective in connecting with pre-believers and to preach the gospel meaningfully to the Taiwanese. We were inspired to “Never say die” in whatever our calling.

The Shilin Truth Lutheran Church managed to build on an active culture of evangelism, discipleship and prayer. Their plan is not to be a “Mega Church”. Instead, each time a membership size of 700 is reached, 200 members will be sent out to plant another church. As a result, they had planted 7 churches, locally and overseas. There are many visionary decorations within the church that keep the church expansion momentum alive. They also adopted the “211” strategy for all its members: Bring 2 pre-believers to church, 1 to cell and 1 to be mentored (1 to 1 mentoring). Bishop Wu also taps on mission teams from overseas to Taiwan, to be their partners who work with Shilin brothers and sisters on personal evangelism.

Many church members have caught the passion, vision and compassion to share the gospel with love. The atmosphere of the church becomes more vibrant and exciting because the spirit of camaraderie to do God’s ministry is built up, God’s power in conversion is experienced and God’s love is enjoyed in the community life. That becomes a strong engine for the church to move forward in responding to the Christ’s love for her church!

Takeaways from the trip

This trip showcased a few key fundamentals that support positive changes in the church and enable the church to continue the path of growth:

1) Developing a culture of Living Out the Great Commission in every member is vital. Such intent is visibly seen and starts at the leadership level of the church.

2) Church members daring to reinvent themselves constantly. This allows them to be effective in reaching the hearts of pre-believers despite fluctuating environments.

3) Never give up on God's ministry no matter how difficult it is. Perseverance is vital for tapping the spiritual blessings from God.

4) Prayer life. The family prayer altar or personal prayer life is highly held in the church. It becomes a place of communion with Christ, receiving from Him the power to do His ministry. The constant prayer coverage for the family members resists the attacks of the evil ones. Thus, the believers can rise up in serving God joyfully.

Conclusion

In JCC/LCS/Singapore, we are not unique in having to deal with challenges within and without the church, even if these challenges have their common as well as unique features. Challenges confront the church worldwide. Are we energised and up for the challenge or are we shrinking away in retreat?

I feel that the takeaways from the Taiwan Education Trip are not for me to keep to myself, but to share with my fellow Christ-loving brothers and sisters. Recognizing our spiritual poverty, let us be united and dedicated in Christian service as we seek God for His blessings!

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