

The History of Jurong Christian Church

Jurong Christian Church:

A congregation under the Lutheran Church in Singapore



**Luther Rose:
A symbol of
Lutheranism**

Jurong Christian Church (JCC) is one of the oldest Lutheran congregations in Singapore, after the Lutheran Church of Our Redeemer (LCOR, started in 1960) and Queenstown Lutheran Church (QLC, dedicated in 1965).

It was originally set up as one of the congregations under the Lutheran Church in Malaysia and Singapore (LCMS). The older name of LCMS was “Lutheran Church in Malaya” (LCM):

LCOR and QLC represented the successful early missionary efforts of the LCA (Lutheran Church in America) in reaching out to the ethnic Chinese population in Singapore through the Lutheran Church in Malaya (LCM), which was established by the missionaries in August 1963 and became an official body on 1st January 1964. According to the book “A Heavenly Vision” by Warren Lau (1993), the LCM had its new name “Lutheran Church in Malaysia and Singapore” (LCMS) officially gazetted by the Registrar of Societies, Malaysia, on 28 September 1967. An online search of the Registry of Societies, Singapore, shows 1st December 1966 as the date of registration in Singapore. Under the LCMS, the Lutheran work on this island was administratively organized as the Singapore District of the LCMS, while the work up north was organized into three other geographical districts.

With the political separation of Malaysia and Singapore, it became necessary to consider reorganizing the structure of this Lutheran body.

In August 1996, the Lutheran Church in Singapore (LCS) was constituted as an independent national church.¹ Therefore, JCC became officially a congregation under the LCS.

Jurong Christian Church:

A New Ecumenical Work in Industrial Jurong



is shown here. The plain and simple building is in stark contrast to the modern Taman Jurong Community Club you see across the road from JCC.

Singapore gained independence from Malaysia in 1965. At that time, Jurong was a lightly inhabited place, whereby most people in Singapore would consider it a “ulu” (remote) place. Here in Jurong, the roads were simply named sequentially as Taman Jurong 1, Taman Jurong 2 ...

Tah Ching Road, where JCC is located, was known as Taman Jurong 12. This road got its present name only in 1970.² A picture of Taman Jurong Community Centre in 1965

In 1964, with the industrialization of Jurong at its embryonic stage, and the successes of LCOR and QLC providing encouragement, the LCM had the sagacity to want to apply for

land in Jurong to begin a new work, and requested the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) for financial support, and requested the Lutheran Church in America (LCA) Board of World Missions for a pastor to do “industrial evangelism” in Jurong. This partly explains the early missionary involvement of LCA in the founding of JCC. With Singapore’s separation from Malaysia and significant unemployment, the industrialization of Jurong gained pace, and the population in Jurong grew in tandem. Consequently, the interest for “industrial evangelism” grew hot with discussions in Christian circles developing apace.

At the meeting of 2nd December 1965, the decision was made by the Council of Churches to bid for a religious site in Jurong. As a member church, the LCM was appointed to submit the tender while all member churches were expected to support the action.

The successful bidding for land at Tah Ching Road was announced by the government on 14th February 1966. Since the land was acquired by the Council of Churches rather than by any individual church, the building project (costing over half a million dollars, a very huge sum in the 1960’s) was financially also an ecumenical partnership of the churches of various denominations. However, for some reasons, one by one the partners in the project withdrew their financial sharing. As a result, the LCA stepped in with their full support and so it came to pass that the architecture for the building was actually designed by Americans. Nevertheless, the nascent work of Christian outreach had to continue with an ecumenical membership.

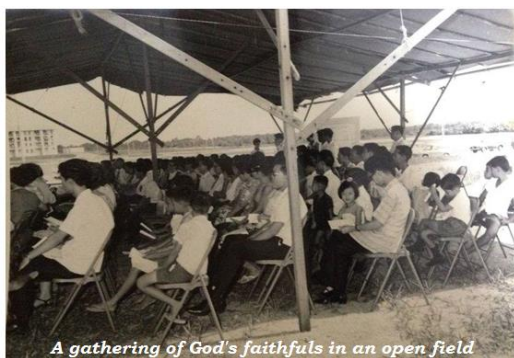
**Jurong Christian Church:
Its beginning in a shophouse in June 1966**



Original building under construction in 1967

With the successful tender for land, building construction would soon begin. Meanwhile, the Council of Churches wasted no time to set up an official ecumenical team to do God’s work. By May 1966, the team was already up and energetic.

In June 1966, LCM rented a shophouse³ a stone’s throw away from Tah Ching Road. In other words, it can be said that Jurong Christian Church began at the shophouse while the building at Tah Ching Road was being constructed. Rev. John Nelson served as its first pastor (part-time) while he was also pastoring Queenstown Lutheran Church. He was assisted by an evangelistic worker, Mr Paul Chong Hee Sing (for the Chinese-speaking membership), from 5th September 1966.



A gathering of God's faithful in an open field

By December 1966, the Jurong Industrial Mission Committee (JIM) was set up by Christian laymen and pastors from various churches. On 6th June 1967, it changed its name to Singapore Industrial Mission Committee (SIM), with committee members drawn from the member churches of the Council of Churches; and became a sub-committee of the Council.

Regular church services started on Sunday, 9th July 1967.

Dedication of Church Building in 1968



Bronze dedication plaque for the original Jurong Church building

The building was dedicated to God on Sunday, 28th July 1968. Representatives from various church denominations were present to take part in the dedication ceremony, presided by Rev. Dr. Ray Nyce, President of the LCMS. They included Archdeacon Lau Teik Oon (Anglican Church), Rev John J. K. Lu (Vice-moderator of the Presbyterian Church in Singapore and Malaysia), Mr. P. S. George

(Mar Thoma Syrian Church), Rev Clement Muzanzi (Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania, Central Synod) and representatives from the German Embassy, Y.W.C.A., the Boys' Brigade and the Singapore Industrial Mission among others. The bronze dedication plaque for our original church building bears testimony to our age as a church in Taman Jurong, and the denominational mix in our formative years provide us with an interesting reminiscence of a "multi-hued" past.

Jurong Christian Church and Civic Centre: Our early missions defined by church and community

There was good reason why in the early years we were called "Jurong Christian Church and Civic Centre".

According to Ray Nyce, in his thesis on "Development & Significance of The Jurong Christian Church of the LCMS" in 1973,⁴ the LCM had in submission to the LWF stated that spiritual care could not be divided from the total program of care to the whole community.

"The LCM maintained vehemently that congregation had to be related to the whole of the community service effort ..."

In discussions about the roles of the Lutheran Church and ecumenical partners, discussions were raised about the realm of spiritual care and the realm of care to the whole community regardless of whether members of the community were part of the Church or "outside" the Church. According to Ray Nyce, agreement was reached that "the general order and discipline of the local congregation will be the responsibility of the Lutheran Church, with ... ecumenical participation in ministry to the Jurong area."

Ray Nyce further said:

"The Singapore Industrial Mission Committee (SIM), set up in the latter part of 1966 at the stimulus of laymen and pastors from various churches in Singapore, contributed significantly to the division between church and Jurong community."

Incidentally, SIM served as a practical training post for seminary students from Trinity Theological College.

Unavoidably, as more and more people were fed into the workforce in the industries, the growing community in Jurong presented increasing demands for needs to be met – housing, social amenities, schools, medical services, etc. Whether the Ecumenical Team members liked it or not, and despite whatever challenges faced over diverse ideas and idealisms, JCC practically had its work cut out to meet the loud calls from the community and to fill the gaps in government endeavours. In other words, it was really not a choice but an imperative for JCC to strive to manage the dichotomy of spiritual care to the Church and the “total program of care” to the community out of Christian love; and at the same time to manage the teething hitches in the ecumenical partnership.

Indeed, meeting the spiritual and social needs of the workers became our intense concerns. Therefore, apart from worship services and preaching of God’s Word, we also provided non-religious educational and personal development programmes to interested participants.

The name JURONG CHRISTIAN CHURCH AND CIVIC CENTRE clearly suggests that the church was not just a church but also a civic centre catering to the recreational needs of the population. As a civic centre, it provided literacy classes, sewing lessons, cooking instructions, instrumental groups, moderate library facilities, counseling, Boys’ Brigade activities, First Aid training, martial arts training, etc. It was intended to serve the industrial community at all levels of social involvement.

The old newspaper reports reproduced here give a snapshot of the activities we provided in serving the workers and residents in Jurong in collaboration with other churches, para-church organizations and community bodies.



A Kindergarten was also set up in the early 1970s, and it has been providing high-quality pre-school education to children in the Jurong neighbourhood up to this day.

Our First Church Workers



We started off without full-time ordained pastor. Rev. John Nelson (working out of Queenstown Lutheran Church) served as our part-time pastor overseer in the beginning.

An American [ELCA] short-term missionary, Miss Anita Ewing, arrived in February 1967. She was our first parish worker who helped in training our kindergarten teachers and conducting classes for factory workers from 1967 – 1969. The last time she wrote to JCC from America was in 2005 when she updated us that she was looking forward to retiring in June 2006.

In May 1967, a Swedish pastor with long experience in social work, the Rev. Daniel Nelsson, came. He became the first full-time pastor-in-charge of the church.



Mr Paul Chong Hee Sing who served from 1966 – 1969 was our first full-time un-ordained evangelistic worker who mainly ministered to the Chinese-speaking members of the church and community. He came shortly after the shophouse was rented in September 1966.

Mdm Honey Lee is a pioneer member of JCC. She is effectively bilingual in English and Mandarin, and was a Church Secretary and an official of the Church Council in the early 1970s. She is still worshipping in JCC today.

About our early work, Dr Ray Nyce commented:

“Daniel Nelsson was getting into the factories, developing broad community contacts and developing an ‘open-door’ approach to the place of the church in the community. Paul Chong and Anita Ewing, LCMS-assigned personnel, had extensive contact with factory workers and other people of the community. Groups and activities started by Anita Ewing with the blessing of the LCMS later became an essential part of the early work under the leadership of Miss Victoria Bashyam, a community organization worker.”

Our Subsequent English Section Church Workers

In May 1970, Rev. David Danielson succeeded Rev. Daniel Nelsson as pastor-in-charge while the latter left on furlough. Rev. John Nelson returned to take up pastoral responsibilities when Rev. Danielson resigned in Feb 1972.

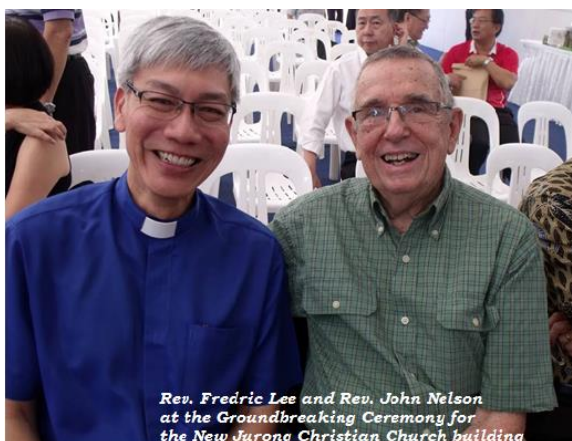
Up to 1973, the missionary pastors all served short stints of not more than three years at a stretch. In 1973, Rev Ralph Kusserow arrived and served the longest period of eight years until 1982 when he and his family returned to America. Obviously, it was not in God’s plan

for the missionaries to stay forever. As the local Lutheran church grew through the years, missionary pastors gradually vacated their places for locals.



As Rev. Kusserow left, Rev. Edmund Lim⁵ became the first Singaporean pastor of JCC, and also the first in LCMS. Serving the English-speaking congregation, we subsequently had Rev. Terry Kee, Rev. William Chang, Rev. Fredric Lee, Rev. Martin Yee, Pastor Michael Christian and Pastor Samuel Wang. Presently, Rev. Anthony Loh and Pastor Andrew

Thinagaran are serving as our pastors in the English section.



We have had a long list of ministers of the Word passing through JCC doors – they sharing their blessings with us (the congregation) and we sharing our blessedness with them. In the process, we have seen new pastors maturing their pastoral ministry before moving on to serve other Lutheran congregations or the mission field while we develop ourselves as lay partners in the Lord's service.

Of the parish workers, apart from Ms Anita Ewing, we had Ms Teng Ting Ching with us for more than ten years before she left in 1997. Then we had Ms Saw Peh Ern who also served as parish worker for a number of years from 2006 while Ms Mindy Yeo served as a Youth Worker from 2008 - 2010. Presently, Peter Cheong is the first person we have appointed as a Deacon in the church from November 2011.

Our Subsequent Chinese Section Church Workers

Our first Chinese pastor was Rev. Chin Tao Sum (金道生) from Hong Kong. Pastor Chin had ministered in Ipoh under the LCMS. He came in April 1969 when we had about 50 worshippers, the majority of whom were from Malaysia, with the rest including workers from Hong Kong and Taiwan apart from a small number of Singaporeans. He also served as worker-in-charge of JCC.

In early 1974, Rev. Chin was assigned to pastor Mas Kuning Church, and Jurong Christian Church engaged Rev. Han Shihan (韩士汉) from Hong Kong to take over the pastoral work. Before the arrival of Rev. Han, the Chinese section had for a period of six months depended on the Church Council and a team of faithful youth to manage the Chinese section ministry.

When Rev. Han retired to America at the end of 1978, the Chinese section was without a full-time shepherd for the whole of 1979. Rev. Choong Chee Pang (鍾志邦) came to assist with the Chinese section ministry and Rev. Kusserow took over as worker-in-charge.

After graduating from Trinity Theological College in 1980, Rev. Chen Tian Nan (曾天南) was recommended by Rev. Choong to serve in the church. He served until he was assigned to Queenstown Lutheran Church. Pastor John Tan Yok Han (陈约翰) then took over. In 1987, Pastor John Tan was ordained and in 1997 he became the first Bishop of the Lutheran Church in Singapore which was formed as a body separate from the LCMS. Rev. Peter Chong (张桂芳) then took over the pastoral ministry, assisted by Pastor Zheng Lianjun (郑莲君).

On 1st April 1999, the pastoral work was passed on to Pastor How Chin Yong (侯振勇) when Rev. Peter Chong was assigned to take charge of the seafarers' mission. In June 2000, Pastor Zheng Lianjun resigned and her place was taken over by Pastor Lee Ka Heng (李加兴) on 1st July 2000.

In 2005, Pastor How was assigned to Queenstown Lutheran Church; and Pastor Lee, to Mas Kuning Lutheran Church. From then, Rev. Chung Tze Lu (鍾子路) has been serving as pastor of the Chinese Section and the worker-in-charge of JCC. He was assisted in the Chinese section by Pastor Low Kim Cheng (刘金清). Pastor Low was posted out to LCS in Jan 2011.

Rev. Caleb Oh (胡希米) was the Chinese parish worker from 1st June 2008 and he joined the pastoral team after being ordained on 4th November 2012. In April 2015, Pastor Lee Ka Heng returned to serve in JCC.

JCCCC becoming JCC

The “Civic Centre” part of the name “Jurong Christian Church and Civic Centre” was dropped in 1971 by the instruction of the Registrar of Societies because by then, ground conditions had changed and the prevailing circumstances made it no longer tenable for the church premises to operate jointly as a civic centre concomitant with its operation as a religious centre.

Two points of note are:

- Our early ecumenical missions and the historical development make clear why we are called Jurong Christian Church and not Jurong Lutheran Church even though we are part of the LCS.
- Although we have dropped the “Civic Centre” from our original name, we have never stopped our active engagement in useful ways with the community.

**Passing of an Era:
Farewell to the old building**



A photo of JCC with an old Jurong shophouse in the background



Photos of JCC taken in 2014: Views from top and front

On 28th December 2014, JCC held its last worship service in the old building at No. 2 Tah Ching Road.

The next day, 29th December 2014, the church shifted to temporary premises at 101 Yuan Ching Road (a former school building).



Groundbreaking ceremony: Mr Tharman (centre) with Bishop Kee on his right

By 24th January 2015, the old building had already been demolished. We held the ground-breaking ceremony at No. 2 Tah Ching Road for a new building to be erected there. We were honoured to have our Deputy Prime Minister & Minister for Finance, Mr Tharman Shanmugaratnam, to grace the event, together with Bishop Terry Kee, church representatives from all the LCS congregations and local community leaders. Our first pastor, Rev. John Nelson, was also present at the ceremony.

Going Forward



At the ground-breaking ceremony for the new building, we were encouraged by Mr Tharman who acknowledged our potential to serve the **community positively** for years to come.

Surely, as we march into the future filled with new challenges, we continue to be available and ready to fulfill our mission to serve God and man in meeting various needs.

Jurong Christian Church Kindergarten, which is housed in the same premises as the church, is still serving the community, keeping itself up-to-date and delivering a high standard of education to pre-schoolers.

Apart from the youth groups in the church, we collaborate with nearby schools in establishing several Boys' Brigade and Girls' Brigade companies to provide healthy avenues for adolescents to develop themselves in safe environments and under good adult guidance.

The ministry to the elderly folks provides a support group that our senior citizens can relate to and draw comfort from. Sometimes, we also organize social activities inviting participations from residents living nearby.

Jurong Christian Church continues to explore new areas that we can be a useful part of the community, in addition to our services as a church to meet spiritual needs of people in Singapore and beyond.

We pray for God's continuing blessings!



¹ <http://www.lutheran.org.sg>

² <http://remembersingapore.org/>

³ The shophouse has since given way to progress.

⁴ Ray Nyce was Director of the Institute for Study of Religions and Society in Singapore & Malaysia

⁵ Rev. Edmund Lim is now pastoring a Lutheran Church in America.