

interact

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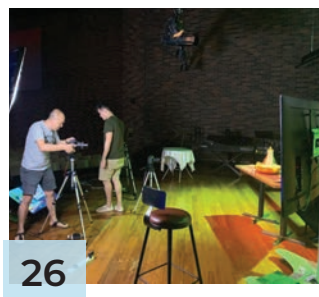
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PASTORS' MESSAGES

REV REUBEN NG

Blessed 50th Anniversary TPMC!

While this is certainly not an anniversary anyone could have expected nor imagined, upon reflection, there is a vital reminder for us all.

Toa Payoh Methodist Church started 50 years ago based primarily on faith in a faithful God, a God which Philippians 1:6 describes as "... He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus."

While the world and our anniversary plans have been thrown off kilter by the virus, ushering in a "new normal", it is an appropriate moment to ask whether our faith in a faithful God is still as strong and steady as when TPMC first begun her journey 50 years ago. Hence the vital reminder — that while many things may be useful and important, faith in a faithful God is truly essential.

While we may not know what the future may hold, we do know who holds the future. We can trust and have faith in a faithful God. Proverbs 3:5-6 tell us to "Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths."

Let us do just that TPMC. And not merely for this year. But for as long as God wills us to be the instruments of his love.

Blessed 50th Anniversary ... it is blessed because we have a faithful God.

REV MING FEONG CHING

We are celebrating 50 years of rich history that began with just a few. Today, we witness what the grace of God can do and together we count the many blessings of the Lord. May the grace of God be upon you all and the love of God continues flowing through us so that we can be witnesses to our Encounters to Love

REV POH ZHI-HUI

Happy Jubilee, TPMC! As we Encounter to Love,

"[May your love] abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, so that you may ...discern what is best and may be pure and blameless for the day of Christ...to the glory and praise of God." (Philippians 1:9-11)



Special

Congratulatory Note from Rev Dr Gordon Wong, President of Trinity Annual Conference (TRAC)

50 years! A Jubilee!

The Scriptures say that every 50th year was meant to be “consecrated”, set apart as special. It was to be a “Jubilee”, a word that in Hebrew had to do with blowing a ram’s horn to proclaim this time of joy and liberty.

“Consecrate the fiftieth year and proclaim liberty throughout the land to all its inhabitants. It shall be a jubilee for you; each of you is to return to your family property and to your own clan” (Leviticus 25:10)



Rev Dr Gordon Wong

The 50th anniversary at Toa Payoh Methodist Church has been “special” in a way that none of us could have imagined. The COVID-19 pandemic has brought restrictions upon everybody. Many celebratory plans were cancelled or severely restricted. But in an ironic way, it has also forced everyone to do as the Scripture verse says: *v Each is to return to your family property!* We have returned and been confined to our homes for so long!

But the Jubilee was also a time to proclaim liberty, a word that everybody would welcome greatly in these COVID-19 days!

Yet “liberty” in the days of Moses meant something very different in every subsequent generation and culture. Each generation and every local church will have to discern what kind of “liberty” is most needed, and most to be celebrated and proclaimed in our community.

Your twenty sister churches in TRAC join you in praising God for bringing you to your year of Jubilee. May we each stay On TRAC Together in proclaiming God’s liberty for all.

“If the Son shall set (us) free, (we) shall be free indeed!” (John 8:36)

May God’s Love and Peace surround you as we stay

On TRAC Together for God’s Word, Worship, Welcome, Witness and Wonder

Take Care to Let God Take Care of You
Rev Dr Gordon Wong, President

Messages

Congratulatory Note from Rev Dr Chiang Ming Shun, District Superintendent (District 3)

I send my warmest greetings to you on your 50th Anniversary!

The mission project that would become Toa Payoh Methodist Church began the year I was born. You started as a free clinic in Lorong 1 in the block where my mother shopped for groceries. A very dear colleague of mine was your first pastor. Your current pastor-in-charge was my wife's schoolmate. So I have a soft spot for Toa Payoh Methodist Church and I am so glad to see how you have grown over the years.

You have grown spiritually as well as in numbers. You have grown in ministry and have even expanded overseas to Cambodia and Thailand. And I am sure you will only continue to grow.

I pray that you will also never forget your first love and always grow in faithfulness to God. As you look on both your achievements and plans, remember what the Apostle Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians 10:15-18: "We do not boast beyond limit in the labours of others. But our hope is that as your faith increases, our area of influence among you may be greatly enlarged, so that we may preach the gospel in lands beyond you, without boasting of work already done in another's area of influence. "Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord." For it is not the one who commends himself who is approved, but the one whom the Lord commends."

May the Lord approve and commend you as your faith increases, as you labour for Him, as your work extends to lands beyond, as you pioneer new areas of ministry. May He continue to bless you all and use you to do mighty works for His Kingdom.

Rev Dr Chiang Ming Shun



Rev Dr Chiang Ming Shun

Message from **50TH ANNIVERSARY COMMITTEE CHAIRPERSON**

By William Ho



“

¹⁰ Consecrate the fiftieth year and proclaim liberty throughout the land to all its inhabitants.

Leviticus 25:10

”

For reasons good and not so good, TPMC members will likely never forget the year that we celebrate our 50th year anniversary!

As early as the second half of 2018, a group of us started planning to celebrate TPMC turning 50 with a series of usual and not-so-usual events. Besides the annual Easter, Anniversary and Light of Christmas celebrations, we were planning for our biennial church camp. We were gearing up to host the annual Trinity Annual Conference (TRAC) session in 2020 and we had in the works a celebratory 50th anniversary dinner outside the church premises. Suffice to say, we were all excited about the line-up of events. Alas, as the COVID-19 situation unfolded, we had to postpone the church camp and the anniversary dinner. The anniversary service will be held online while a decision has yet to be made on how the annual TRAC session will be conducted. Discussions are also ongoing on reconceptualising the Light of Christmas event if mass gatherings are still discouraged.

“

²⁰ Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, ²¹to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.

Ephesians 3:20-21

”

Nonetheless, we were very blessed to be able to carry out one planned event during the Easter weekend, just after the start of the COVID-19 circuit breaker. TPMC Gives presented us with the opportunity of being the first organization in Singapore to conduct an offsite blood donation drive during the COVID-19 circuit breaker when the country needed to replenish its blood banks. When we first planned for the blood donation drive (along with the bread-giving outreach) back in September 2019, the term “COVID-19” was not coined! The blood donation drive became a powerful testimony to the community of the self-giving love of God. At the same time, the Jubilee Fund, our fund-raising project for various outreach programmes, has also received significant contributions despite the uncertain economic environment. How great is our God!

Looking back and grasping the present, no celebratory events would have been more impactful than COVID-19 to remind us to give thanks for the fellowship and the opportunities to worship and serve as a family at TPMC for the past 50 years. Glory to God and onward to the next 50 years!

P.S. We will celebrate in 2021! (Probably)



Mr William Ho

INTERVIEW WITH FOUNDING PASTOR *REV MICHAEL WONG*



1970



2020

“

In 1968, when there was news that a new town called Toa Payoh was coming up, I had a feeling that this was the place that I should go to, rather than work in an institutional (established) church. I thought I should walk the streets and meet the people here. The actual work started in the same year when I met with the Board of Social Concerns at Wesley Methodist Church and the Committee of Social Concerns of St. Andrew's Cathedral.

We had a few meetings and decided on a social outreach to Toa Payoh because the town had specific needs. The residential blocks had been built but there were no clinics around. So I felt that we should provide medical facilities in Toa Payoh for its new residents. We rented a shophouse at Block 110 Lorong 1 to run a clinic every evening from 7 to 10pm. We managed to receive a good response and had doctors and nurses from both churches helping. We also decided to reach the community by connecting with the children. Hence, we invited the Singapore Children's Society to run programmes at the shophouse during the day.

One night in 1969, during my devotional time, I firmly felt that the Lord was telling me that I should get out of my comfort zone at Wesley Methodist Church and come to Toa Payoh which would be more challenging and difficult. I thanked God that my wife affirmed the calling. She said that she had married a pastor and would follow me wherever God asked me to go.

Oral history interviews record an individual's account of past events and experiences. They provide an insight into the thoughts and feelings of people who were active participants in these events. In conjunction with the 50th anniversary of the church, an oral history interview was conducted in May 2020 with Reverend Michael Wong, the founding pastor of Toa Payoh Methodist Church. Below is an abridged version of the interview:

Transcribed by Yeo Anne

As a Methodist pastor, I had to propose to the District Conference to start a church in Toa Payoh so that I could be sent here. The District Conference accepted my proposal and recommended it to the Annual Conference. The Annual Conference affirmed my proposal and decided that it would send me to Toa Payoh. For the following six months, I would come to Toa Payoh every evening with a Milkmaid box and portable speaker. In the open field opposite the current MRT station, I would stand on the box, sing hymns loudly and preach the gospel. To me, this was the beginning of Toa Payoh Methodist Church when people responded to the preaching. Halfway through 1970, some Methodists also moved into Toa Payoh and the community grew.

What got us accepted was the help that we rendered to the community. In 1971, there was a great flood in Singapore. The farms in nearby Potong Pasir were covered with water and you could see dead chickens and pigs floating in the floodwater. I thought that this was an opportunity to see how God could help us. I went out and brought people whose houses were flooded, to the shophouse. The shophouse was their home for about a week. I still remembered my poor wife having to fry rice for breakfast, lunch, and dinner for five days to feed about 48 people. This was the point where the people were touched, and they commented that "Your God is really a loving God". Even in a disaster, God turns it into an opportunity for people to find hope. This is why Toa Payoh Methodist Church is here, to bring the hope of God to the people.

Toa Payoh Methodist Church is God's plan. If it were a human plan, we would not be sitting on this land today. The land was designated as a religious site, not necessarily a church. Even though we had competition for the site and we (together with Toa Payoh Chinese Methodist Church) put in the lowest bid, we secured the land.

During the week from Monday to Friday, we ran a kindergarten, with a church member volunteering to be the teacher. We started with about 25 children. We not only [ministered] to the needs of the children but, more importantly, [had] access to their homes. It is for the people that God wants a Methodist church here in Toa Payoh. So in the year before we moved here, a group of leaders, about eight or nine of them, made it a point to visit every home within the year.

That is how Toa Payoh Methodist Church was started and how she has grown. I am very blessed to come back here in 2012. For the church, I say "God, thank you". I know what it means to be contented when I come before Him.



Photo from antiques-atlas.com

New Staff

Interview with Jasmine Ng



Can you share with us how you got the job here at Toa Payoh Methodist Church (TPMC)?

I saw the job posting. I met the requirements and hence sent in my application.

What were you doing prior to joining the church office?

I have been in the accounting line for many years. I have previously worked in different industries such as healthcare and education and in churches.

What excites you most about working here?

I enjoy the company of my colleagues and their warmth and authenticity.

If you could pick 3 foods to eat for the rest of your life, what would they be?

I prefer food prepared by my loved ones. They include my mother's mee sua, my husband's sesame oil chicken, and my daughter's carbonara.

NEW BORN



On 15 March 2020, Alphis and Hannah were blessed with their first child, Claire Tay Yi Xin.



On 21 April 2020, Joseph and Jing Yu were blessed with their first child, Noah Ng Jie En.

newlyweds

Cuttilan Ravi Amran and Teo Lay Hoon

on 27 June 2020



TPMC'S 50TH ANNIVERSARY

THOUGHTS AND FEELINGS FROM MEMBERS

2020 is the 50th anniversary of Toa Payoh Methodist Church. We gather thoughts and feelings from long-serving members of the Filipino Ministry and the exuberant youths from Youth Fusion.

1

ABOUT YOUR FONDEST MEMORIES OF TPMC

Kristal Chan: My fondest memories are definitely the youth days! I was brought into TPMC and accepted Christ in one of the youth camps. We had a lot of fun in Youth Fusion (YF). It was great growing up there.

May Adier: I have a lot of unforgettable and precious memories of TPMC but the one I would consider top of the list is the day I decided to stay and be involved in the Filipino Ministry. I am so blessed that I consider TPMC as my spiritual family. My newfound friends and sisters in faith are my source of joy in times of sorrow. The Lord changed my life and made me a better person through TPMC.

Johnson Lee: When I started worshipping in TPMC in 1984, the main Sunday service was held at 8am, and we had to vacate the sanctuary for the Chinese service at 10am. The second service was at 5pm – the sanctuary was not air-conditioned then and would have been too hot if service was held earlier! After redevelopment, it is now much easier to arrange service times and we have lifts! We used to have to help the wheelchair bound up and down the stairs! Thank God for the progress!

Lye Kuan Loy: I think the most memorable has been to see how God raised a group of leaders who think big and embarked on the first church redevelopment, trusting that God will provide all the resources. We had been planning the project for years, but nothing happened until God brought it all together through a group of committed leaders and members to realise that vision. We did all sorts of things to raise funds and made many adjustments to church ministry and use of spaces. We saw how support and cooperation with TPMC was strengthened through this project. All glory to God who makes all things possible.

Jefta Rabotazo: My fondest memories of TPMC was the first time I joined the service and the time I decided to stay with the ministry. The first time I visited TPMC, I felt that it is not just a church but a home where our heavenly Father wants me to be. I am blessed by a family that I long to have.

Yuen HK: Though Diana and I did not have a church wedding, Reverend Michael Wong consented to give us a marriage blessing during a Sunday worship service.

2

ABOUT THANKING GOD

Kristal Chan: There are a lot of families in TPMC but that was not a roadblock to them becoming my family. I thank God for the people at TPMC who have impacted me in so many ways. Witnessing their heart for God and His people has really encouraged and shaped me. I am blessed to have found authentic friends with whom I can be open to and journey with.

Yuen HK: I thank God that I found my life partner here.

Sharen Fu: My family are first generation Christians and TPMC is our first church where we have worshipped since 2004. We thank God for the programmes in the Children's Ministry and volunteer teachers. My children's enthusiasm in attending church regularly had led us to where we are today. Currently, Peter and I are involved in the Children's Ministry!

Nicole Ho: For the friends who brought me here! I have been fortunate to integrate into a community of encouraging people who support me, and for the opportunities to serve God in various capacities, whether in youth camp or as a Connect Group leader.



3

ABOUT GROWING IN CHRISTIAN MATURITY

May Adier: Through the church, God taught me to always see the important things in life. I begin to see the importance of fellowship and loving others, learning to forgive, and focusing on things that would bless me and the people around me.

Marieflor Jalapa: I believed that I have matured through my ministry involvement, serving the people, and knowing more about God. Through TPMC, God has strengthened my faith. The church has also cultivated in me the desire to be intentional in caring for and encouraging others.

Rutchanie Santiago Jarabilo: In the Filipino Ministry, Brother Angel encourages us to do our devotions using the Encounter Journal (EJ). Using the EJ has helped a lot in my spiritual maturity because I get to reflect my everyday life in God's Word. Studying the scriptures helps me to stay spiritually strong and meditating on His Word creates an awareness that warns me if I am headed in the wrong direction.

Wee Hian Woon: TPMC shaped me for a purposeful life as a senior. I started teaching in the Sunday School and over the years, served in various leadership positions. Currently, I am fulfilling God's purpose for me in the ministry of the Word.

Yuen HK: Keeping faith in God when shift work and travel duties alienated me from regular church attendance.



Marieflor Jalapa



Rutchanie Santiago Jarabilo



Wee Hian Woon

4

ABOUT SUPPORT IN TIMES OF NEED

Marieflor Jalapa: My Filipino community has always been supportive and caring in many ways. Through our Connect Groups, we support each other in prayer and practical needs.

Rutchanie Santiago Jarabilo: In situations when someone loses a loved one back home in the Philippines, each one of us would voluntarily contribute to the family. I am so grateful that we help one another in times of need in the ministry. My Connect Group leader also motivates us to manage our finances by only spending \$20 on our off day.

Jefftha Rabotazo: TPMC has been my source of comfort, love and care. When I am faced with difficult trials in my life, my Connect Group would pray and encourage me to trust God. They would provide practical help when needed.

Nicole Kok



Shane Lim



Susan Seah



5

ABOUT THE FUTURE OF TPMC

May Adier: I hope to see an increase in number of people getting saved through evangelistic efforts and influence in the community, as the church continues to further the kingdom of God.

Marieflor Jalapa: I hope to see the people in TPMC having stronger relationships with one another.

Johnson Lee: My wish for TPMC is that the congregation will truly build their lives around the church, from the spiritual to the practical aspects of life, be it physically in church or virtually like what we are doing now. The church may be able to organize our resources to meet these needs, starting with earnest prayers and drawing from the resources of the wider church as required.

Lye Kuan Loy: I hope to see TPMC grow into a family-based church with emphasis on growing strong families who worship and serve God together.

Wee Hian Woon: In the future TPMC will face the dangers of increased secularism and self. Spirituality takes second priority to chasing after the counterfeit gods of the world. My prayer is for all to keep undivided faith by being rooted in the Word of God.

6

ABOUT WHAT YOU MISS MOST ABOUT TPMC

Marieflor Jalapa: I miss the physical gathering with fellow believers, the fellowship, and the activities we do in the Filipino Ministry.

Nicole Kok: What I miss most about TPMC now are the physical services. Even though there are online services, it is never as fun as when we all meet together.

Shane Lim: I miss the physical interactions we have in church, especially the hype from the youngsters in Youth Fusion.

Jefftha Rabotazo: I miss worshipping together physically as a family.

Susan Seah: I joined TPMC on 25th December 1974 at the age of 16 and have since been attending the church. I miss the fun and carefree days of the Methodist Youth Fellowship. Those youthful days were exciting, and we had good fellowship.

Yuen HK: I miss the weekly fellowship as Methodist Adult Fellowship members gather at the hawker centre across the road after Friday night meetings.

SERVING AS A FAMILY, ANYWHERE

By James, Sharon, Audrey & Zoe Lim

LET'S GO TO CHIANG MAI!

We have desired to go for a mission trip as a family for a while and our first attempt did not happen as the kids came down with hand, foot and mouth disease at the last minute. So in 2019, when the call came, we felt we needed to catch this opportunity. We wanted to share God's love and to be of some help. But truth be told, we also did it so that our children (Audrey and Zoe) could think beyond themselves and learn to serve others more. We wanted them to see just how blessed we all are in Singapore.

In preparing for the trip, we prayed for the right attitude, that God would use us to bless others. We were primed to expect last minute changes and to be very flexible. We also reminded Audrey and Zoe that this trip was not about us but about the people we would be reaching out to and thus to be willing to do anything that we were called upon during the trip.



MANY EXPERIENCES

We were met by our local missionaries in Chiang Mai, Florence and Angela. We served alongside the local Christians and communities that they had been working with. We served in different settings, in a village, church, boys' home and lepers' home. We served using different "skills", acting, singing, sharing testimonies, packing boxes, cooking, and rolling prata while manning a food stall. We also sang carols in different languages. Our children, Audrey and Zoe, took part in everything.

In a flurry of activity, what linked everything together were the common purposes – to share God's love and the sense of community – with Christians we served alongside with, and knowing that it was really God who enabled everything. We were just being available, open, and helping one another, even

though sometimes we did not comprehend what we were doing! God used us all the same. We trusted that while we faced challenges in communication, there are no communication barriers with God. He is the One speaking and meeting needs.



VILLAGE OUTREACH

Our outreach event at Mae Ja was particularly memorable. We borrowed the yard of an elderly villager who was mute and hard-of-hearing, but he watched us with interest from the window of his one-room home. The “stage” backdrop was a draped cloth, with the words “Life of Christmas” in red cardboard letters that we had cut out that afternoon and were now attached securely with safety pins. Coming from the land of PowerPoint, lighting and sound systems, this was refreshingly simple and done with a lot of heart.

The village children were seated on the ground near the performance area, the adults in chairs surrounding the compound. Our performances and activities felt quite “organic”, i.e., adjust and improvise as we go along. Zoe narrated our skit in English, while Florence translated. James and I trudged along the stage as Joseph and Mary. Audrey was part of the host of angels. For all of us, besides our planned roles, the attitude was one of just being prepared to chip in and do whatever was needed. From being activated for an unexpected acting role (James had to do this!) to picking lucky draw tickets (Audrey and Zoe did this), to being called

upon to pray. Eventually, it was all done – the Word was preached, testimonies shared, the Christmas story told, songs sung, and gifts given out. Thank God that a couple of families responded to the call to come forward to be prayed for healing. Though we did not witness a revival-like response to the outreach event, we knew that we had served as God had called us, seeds were planted, and God would continue to move in this community. Though we were tired after the performances and activities, we felt blessed to serve.



MANY BLESSINGS

To those considering going on a family missions trip, start making plans. Our children are more adaptable than we think. Audrey and Zoe are aged 11 and 9, and hence would be able to understand and participate in the activities meaningfully. They also came away appreciating how blessed we are, and realizing how simply other families and churches get by, without televisions, air-conditioning, comfortable seats, etc.

For us, this will be a memorable event in our journey of faith as a family. We strongly encourage all families to go for at least one missions trip together and allow God to open our eyes to the needs to less developed communities. More importantly, it provides the opportunity to give wholeheartedly without expecting anything in return. Finally, it pushes our faith in God to move when we submit ourselves to do whatever He has called us. We hoped to be a blessing, but like all missions trips that we had experienced, we came away much more blessed instead.



A CG OUTING WITH A DIFFERENCE

By Lu Thiam Seng

Thinking of an outing or a weekend getaway for your Connect Group (CG) that will be both enriching and significant? Why not consider a missions trip to Bintan? Tanjung Pinang, a city in Bintan, is only a two-hour ride away by fast ferry from Tanah Merah Ferry Terminal. You can leave at 7.30 am on Saturday and be back in Singapore by 4.30 pm on Sunday. Five of us from Toa Payoh Methodist Church (Chin, Betty, Denise, Ambrose & Thiam Seng) rode on the ongoing mission work by Christ Methodist Church and visited Bintan on 11th and 12th January 2020. We saw and experienced for ourselves the work being done there, through reaching out to about 70 children (aged between 3 to 15) in the Gloria Senggarang Centre (GSC) on Saturday afternoon and making home visitations to local Bintan families on Sunday morning.

Arriving at a hotel located in the heart of Tanjung Pinang City, a 15-minute walk from the ferry terminal, we quickly settled in before moving out to savour the local food for our lunch. Then it was a 7-minute boat ride from Tanjung Pinang to GSC to help with the children's programme in the afternoon. The children turned up at 3 p.m. to register for the programme which comprised worship, bible lessons, and art and craft. It was a great time of singing and fun-filled activities aimed at sharing the Word of God with the children. At 5.30 p.m. we left the centre for our boat ride back to Tanjung Pinang where we had our dinner and team debrief before settling in for the night.

We were back at GSC for about 3 hours on Sunday morning for home visitation. Apart from paying a courtesy call to the village head, the team visited several families, praying for those who allowed us and bringing our gifts of Chinese New Year goodies to bless them.

Over a weekend, we were exposed to a different type of lifestyle and outreach that is both eye-opening and meaningful. What is the cost of and how can we prepare for the trip?

- The budget is approximately \$110 per person, which covers twin-sharing hotel accommodation for a night, fast ferry rides between Tanah Merah Ferry Terminal and Tanjung Pinang, motorised sampan trips between Tanjung Pinang and GSC, and four meals.
- You have to attend a pre-trip training session and prepare materials to be used for the children's programme
- You should not have motion sickness when travelling by sea
- You should be comfortable conversing in Teochew and Bahasa Indonesia

The trip is compact, very affordable, and doable. As it is conducted over a weekend, vacation leave is not required. Most importantly, the experience of the Lord's work in Bintan cannot be measured. Hence when the dust has settled on the COVID-19 situation, a weekend outreach to Bintan is worth considering by our CGs.

Missions in Covid-19

By Audrey Ong

How have our overseas ministries been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic? We ask our missionaries in Thailand and Cambodia, Florence Leow, Angela Sng and Carol Ong.

To continue ministering to and keeping in touch with their congregations, church services, small groups, and bible classes have moved online. Some services are pre-recorded while others are streamed live. For Florence who oversees churches in different locations around Chiang Mai, doing ministry online means she has been able to stay in touch with her church leaders without having to travel long distances to visit them in their respective villages.

During the school holidays, the boys at Term Fun Home (a home for boys started by Angela and her husband John), have returned home to their hometowns. School holidays were also extended due to COVID-19. Nonetheless, Angela and John are able to keep touch with the boys via messaging apps.

Carol has been in Singapore since the circuit breaker period started. She keeps in touch with her local ministry team via electronic means, as they take the step to lead in the local church.

Despite churches being affected by COVID-19, the situation has created opportunities for outreach. As families and communities struggle from unemployment and slowdown in economic activity, churches have stepped up to bless them by giving necessities such as rice. People have also become more open to the gospel. In Cambodia, we hear of people who prayed to receive Jesus at Odem where Carol's ministry is located. In Thailand, non-believers have also joined online services and small groups.



How can we pray for the missions fields during the COVID-19 pandemic? Florence, Angela, and Carol have the following prayer needs:

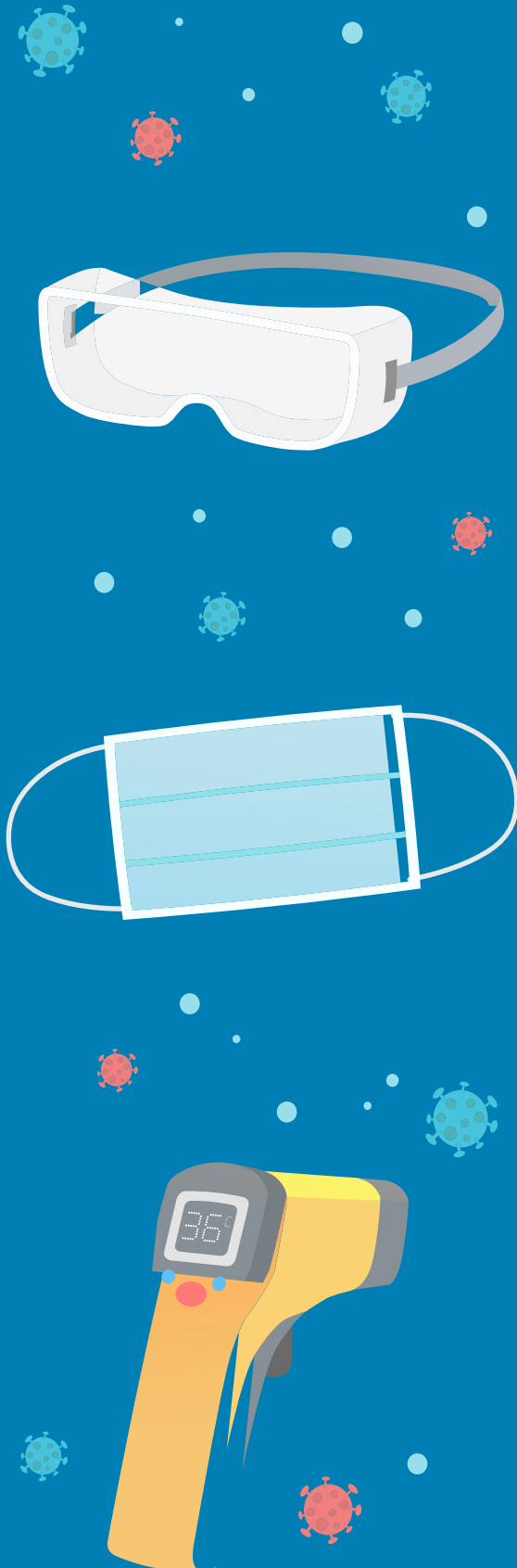
All: Pray that church members continue to stay faithful despite the difficulties during the COVID-19 pandemic. Pray that small groups that have started during this period continue to meet faithfully and grow deeper in their knowledge of God.

Florence: Pray that the non-believers who have been joining online services and small groups would come to know more about Jesus.

Angela: Pray for the church members whose livelihoods have been affected due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Pray that the church will be able to find creative ways to help them.

Carol: Pray for local believers to step up and take the lead, and creatively use their gifts and resources that God has provided to reach their own people in ways that they can understand, accept and embrace faith in God.

ON THE FRONTLINE



**JENN
SIOW**

DEPLOYMENT TO ISOLATION FACILITY

I was initially deployed to hotels that the authorities used to accommodate migrant workers when they were moved out of their dormitories. Subsequently, I was deployed to the CIF at the Changi Exhibition Centre (CEC). I logged 12-hour shifts at the hotels. However, each shift at CEC is only between four and six hours long so as to reduce contact with infected migrant workers.

My biggest challenge is safety. At the hotels, semi-Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) had to be worn when going to the rooms. At CEC, I must wear the full PPE whenever I step into the “red zone”. Regardless of the environment, I have to constantly remind myself to take good care of my personal hygiene and follow all the standard procedures strictly so that my family and friends are also safe.

Working at an isolation facility has allowed me to come into constant social contact with migrant workers. I can feel their anxieties, from the fear of contracting COVID-19 to the uncertainties concerning their employment. However, there were times when my colleagues and I had to step in to enforce the rules after the migrant workers gathered to drink, socialise and gamble in the wee hours.

Jenn works as a Safety & Security Manager. She was deployed to hotels where migrant workers were temporarily housed and a Community Isolation Facility (CIF) where migrant workers who were asymptomatic or had mild symptoms from COVID-19 were quarantined and treated.

My usual role is primarily to ensure premise security, and safety of employees and migrant workers. However, with the COVID-19 outbreak, my responsibilities have increased to include lockdown of premises, ensuring that migrant workers do not leave their rooms or premises except for essential work, maintaining constant social distancing, and escorting medical personnel and migrant workers within and out of the premises.

FEELING FEARFUL, STRESSED AND UNCERTAIN

I recalled having a sleepless night prior to my first day of duty at an isolation facility. Many thoughts were running through my mind. I was fearful of the virus, terrified of the unknown, and concerned for my family. I had tried many ways to avoid such assignments but to no avail.

The initial mental stress was tremendous, from the fear of being infected to the challenge of dealing with numerous migrant workers, assisted by only a handful of colleagues. Every single day seemed like a battle as we were constantly confronted with questions and feelings of frustration from migrant workers. They asked when they could return to the dormitories and whether they would continue to be paid, questions which we had no answers to.



BE STILL AND KNOW GOD

“

*Be still, and know
that I am God; I will
be exalted among
the nations, I will be
exalted in the earth*

Psalms 46:10

Since DORSCON turned orange, this verse has been humming inside me, even till this day. Gradually but surely, I have learnt to be patient and still, and let God do His work. We may not always understand why things are happening in a certain way, but we can be certain who will always be with us in times of adversity.

I thank God for His provision during this pandemic, for there is nothing lacking for my family and me. With Him, I have found peace, joy and meaning in going to work. I have learnt to be patient and gentle when dealing with migrant workers who have come a long way to make a living for their families. I am also more appreciative of the people and things around me, no longer taking them for granted.



MARIA VINODINI

Maria is an occupational therapist at the Institute of Mental Health (IMH). She was part of a medical team deployed to one of the migrant workers' dormitories.

My job scope during this deployment is different from my usual work at IMH. My team members and I monitor the health of migrant workers, attend to those who are unwell and collect swab samples where necessary. I also help to translate for Tamil-speaking migrant workers and lend them a listening ear when they share their concerns and problems.

My working hours have changed as I also work on weekends and public holidays now. There are also more precautionary measures such as wearing personal protective equipment (e.g. N95 mask, face shield, cap and gloves), sanitising workstations and disinfecting personal belongings. I initially found it uncomfortable and hot wearing the personal protective equipment. However, I have gotten used to it and understand that the procedures have to be strictly followed so that my family, team members and I would be safe. I also take a shower at a nearby swimming complex to thoroughly clean myself before returning home.



I am grateful for this opportunity to serve our migrant friends and bring the love and peace of God to them during these uncertain times. I also thank God for giving my family and I His peace and the assurance of His protection so that we are not fearful of contracting the virus and infecting others.

I feel very blessed to have the support and prayers of my family, Connect Group and church. The medical team that I work alongside at the dormitory consists mostly of fellow Christians. I am inspired by the way they minister to the patients and empathise with them and it has spurred me to do the same. I have also come to realise that there are many distractions and things that we can actually do without in our daily lives. Most importantly, I am thankful to be reminded that God is in control and He will bring this situation to pass in His time.



RACHAEL GABRIELLE CHEW

Ms Rachael Gabrielle Chew worships at the 10.30am service. She works as a nurse in a specialist obstetrics and gynaecology clinic. She also volunteers in a clinic that provides medical services to the migrant worker community.

INITIAL CHALLENGES

We see a large number of foreigners at my clinic. Hence, we have to be careful as our patients also include pregnant women and healthcare workers from restructured hospitals. During the start of the COVID-19 situation, one of the main challenges was dealing with patients who did not realise the severity of the situation and could not understand the need for safety measures. I also had to deal with difficult patients, including those who provided false information in their health and travel declarations. However, as people became more informed, our patients also became more cooperative.

As the situation developed, we soon had to put on additional Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) for the safety of our patients and ourselves. It was both physically and mentally testing to go through an entire day in the PPE as it made simple actions like drinking water and going to the toilet difficult. The heat generated from the additional layers of clothing and working in a non-air-conditioned environment (due to ventilation requirements) made matters worse.

PERSONAL STRUGGLES

My thoughts are always with the people that I encounter. Given the nature of my working environment, I was very concerned that I might contract the virus and in turn, passed it to my family and friends. For a period, I stayed away from church due to this concern. When the circuit breaker was implemented nationwide, the inability to meet with my parents and brother also weighed heavily on me as I was concerned for their well-being. This experience reminded me not to take our family for granted and I was really thankful that I did not postpone any of the dinner dates and family get-togethers before the circuit breaker period.

“

As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today.

Genesis 50:20



GOD MEANT IT FOR GOOD

My new Connect Group (CG) Dunamis was born in these uncertain times and our first meeting was via Zoom. I really thanked God that we could still have our worship services and Love Feast (during Maundy Thursday) online and bond with my CG mates. We used the CG sessions for authentic sharing. Another thing for which I am thankful is that I can now attend and have access to online conferences to equip myself spiritually. All these events reminded me that what the enemy intended for evil, God can use it for good.



RICHARD PHUA

Richard Phua was deployed as a Safe Distancing Enforcement Officer with the National Environment Agency (NEA). He has since been redeployed to another area of work. He is now working with the Inland Revenue Authority of Singapore (IRAS).

The COVID-19 outbreak created new roles with some 3,000 safe distancing ambassadors deployed daily islandwide. These roles also provide short-term employment to those whose jobs have been affected by the pandemic.

I have been deployed to join NEA as a Safe Distancing Enforcement Officer since the start of the circuit breaker in early April. My work starts as early as 7.00am and ends in the afternoon. My role as an enforcement officer in a popular wet market and hawker centre is to ensure that the public observes safe distancing measures such as standing at least 1 to 2 metres apart, proper wearing of masks and making sure that no one loiters in the vicinity.

The challenges that I face as I fulfil my role in the frontline include the fear of infection (and subsequently infecting my family and loved ones) and handling uncooperative people. As I am deployed to a popular and mature HDB estate, I also meet elderly people who speak in different dialects. Hence, I have learnt to speak their languages and befriend them so that I can communicate effectively with them.

Some of the elderly people do not understand the reasons for safe distancing. They may even have problems adjusting and feel frustrated when they are told to keep a distance from other people in the queue. Nonetheless, they eventually comply, albeit grudgingly, after I have made my point by informing them of the safety measures and instructions.

Throughout this period, I have learnt to trust God to teach me to be humble and willing to help others so that I can be more approachable to those who are struggling or in need. In this regard, I have been greatly encouraged by one of my favourite Bible verses and a quote from C.S. Lewis, a Christian writer.

“

In the same way, you who are younger, submit yourselves to your elders. All of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, because God opposes the proud but shows favour to the humble.

1 Peter 5:5

“

Humility is not thinking less of yourself; it's thinking of yourself less

C.S. Lewis



DR GOH & DR WONG KAR CHENG WENG HOA

Dr Goh Kar Cheng is a general practitioner, while Dr Wong Weng Hoa works in a hospital. Dr Goh was deployed to the Woodlands Lodge 1 dormitory for three weeks and a swab isolation facility for another three weeks. Dr Wong was deployed to Sungei Tengah Lodge. Both have since returned to their regular medical practice. This is Dr Goh's account of their experience.



COVID-19 has brought two dimensions of life from a hitherto subconscious state into the conscious. One is the professional life, in which we care for and as much as possible, heal the sick. As the epidemic unfolded and transformed into a pandemic, a longstanding anticipation of going into battle heightens. The many weeks of preparation to take up arms, in this case the donning of personal protective equipment (PPE), was finally proving to be useful.

Preparations included increasing the frequency and intensity of regular exercises, maintaining a healthy balanced diet, and getting enough sleep in order to keep the immune system in tiptop shape. Our family was also briefed on measures to take when we are at the front line. A plan was then put in place to minimise exposure risk to the rest of the family, including staggered mealtimes. This also meant a significant reduction in interaction with and speaking to our children from a distance, and dropping food outside the house of our elderly parents. But these are sacrifices that a disciplined doctor will subject himself/herself, in order to avail himself/herself for the greatest call of one's professional life.

Is there a fear of going to the frontline? Not really, as long as we adhere to strict infection control measures and the donning of PPE, according to the logical mind. But there is always the subconscious worry about unknowingly bringing the infection home. So would we do it all over again? Yes! Because it was an opportunity to bring care and concern to a vulnerable population of migrant workers, to convey through our goggled eyes and muffled voices, with much gesticulating to overcome language barriers, the message that we were here for them. Many were fearful about losing their jobs and being infected, and worried for their families back home as the pandemic raged

on. But as they saw all the help at hand for them, and the care they received thus far, fear turned into appreciation for the Singapore government and her people. Many expressed gratitude to us in the course of our work and we were thankful to be able to contribute a small part.

The other dimension concerns the spiritual life. My personal view is that this virus is so timely in the Year of Jubilee. This pandemic caused us to pause. Activities slowed down, with some even grounding to a halt, including religious ones. It thus freed me to really go into deep communion with God, taking time to read and understand His Word, uninterrupted by the need to attend to other matters. It also caused me to evaluate what it means to be a Christian. First and foremost, it means to know God through knowing His Word well and spending extended time in His presence. In our hectic world, we often tend towards doing Christian than being Christian. The late Dr D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones put it as such in his book, *Studies in the Sermon on the Mount*:

"The Christian Gospel places all its primary emphasis upon being, rather than doing."

Often, I find myself distracted from being because of all the busy doing. Hence, I am grateful for this lockdown period. It is my personal Jubilee, a time of retreat when I rediscover the secret place where only God and I are in communion, a place where I can put down my burdens and be at rest. Would I give this place up when the lockdown is lifted and the usual busyness returns? No! Once you find the secret place to be with God, you will want to protect that precious sanctuary from anything and any activity that threatens to take you away from it.





TPMC'S COVID-19 JOURNEY AND HIDDEN HEROES

2020 is a special year for Toa Payoh Methodist Church (TPMC). This year, we celebrate our Golden Jubilee, and plans had been set in place for a series of events throughout the year, to remember God's blessings and how He has guided our growth over 50 years.

However, by the end of January 2020, there was growing unease of an epidemic as reports of cases of people infected with a new coronavirus (COVID-19) emerged in Singapore. Soon, the authorities began to require religious organisations to screen visitors to their premises as a means to prevent a community spread of the disease. This article recounts the steps taken by TPMC and how our people rallied together despite the challenges.

SCREENING OF WORSHIPPERS

TPMC did not waste any time getting started. On 9th February 2020, worshippers were greeted warmly by our pastors, Local Church Executive Committee leaders and staff as they entered the foyer to the sanctuary. Worshippers were then led through a series of stations where they declared their travel and health history, checked that they were not having a fever and registered their contact details. As an added precaution, worshippers also sanitized their hands as they entered the sanctuary.

While it sounds simple, the flow of human traffic had to be well planned out in order to allow for adequate safe distancing and not create unnecessary queues. Christopher, our Property and Facilities Executive, was instrumental in designing the entire set-up. We were also thankful to the leaders who volunteered at the temperature screening and hand sanitizing stations. Together with our pastors, they helped to communicate the importance of these new measures to our regular worshippers and visitors alike. To prepare our worshippers for the "new experience", a video clip explaining the various stations was also disseminated.



CREATING CLEAN AND SAFE SPACES

The importance of clean and hygienic surfaces could not be further emphasized. A call was made to recruit volunteers to man the screening stations as well as to clean and disinfect high-touch surfaces in the sanctuary between services. These surfaces included the arm and backrests of seats, handlebars on gallery staircases and door handles. It was inspiring to see people rallying together and give of themselves for the greater good. In the call to action, we were able to assemble three facility preparation teams (one team per Sunday) to man-up the various stations and prepare the facilities for our services.



WHAT HAPPENS THEN TO THE CHURCH PREMISES AFTER SERVICES ON SUNDAYS?

Well, this was where Mary and her team come in. Auntie Mary (as she is affectionately known) is the caretaker of our church. She has three other staff – Stany, Kavi and Kokilah – to oversee the upkeep and cleanliness of the church facilities on weekdays. As the COVID-19 situation developed over the following months, they have taken on new tasks to disinfect the lifts, sanctuaries (including the TPCMC sanctuary) and prayer rooms more frequently. Do you know that we have also acquired a misting machine to disinfect the sanctuary before we open for service every Sunday?

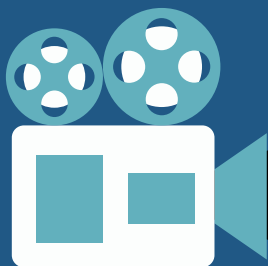
PERSISTING THROUGH THE CHALLENGES

COVID-19 forced the activities of many organisations to slow down or grind to a halt. We were not spared. Our main concern was the spiritual health of worshippers as physical church services were suspended across Singapore. In this regard, we thank God that we did not skip a single service as the team of pastors and staff prepared and transited to online services from 22nd March 2020 (Read more about it in page 26-27).



However, due to the restrictions on overseas travel and congregating in places like restaurants, we were left with little choice but to defer the biennial Church Camp and the 50th Anniversary Dinner to 2021. That said, the TPMC Gives Committee did not let up and worked tirelessly behind the scenes to safely conduct a bread distribution exercise and a blood donation drive in church, so that TPMC can continue to be a blessing to our community (Read more about it in the page 28-29).

While we could not have foreseen the impact of COVID-19 on TPMC and Singapore at the start of 2020, we praise and thank God for His providence in seeing us through the challenges. Our heartfelt appreciation also goes out to the leaders and numerous members who, together with the church staff, continued to labour in love for the sake of His church at TPMC, trusting in His perfect timing when we can all physically gather again in the sanctuary to give glory and honour to Jesus, our King.



TRANSITIONING TO ONLINE SERVICES



We are living in unprecedented times. The effects of COVID-19 are far-reaching and severe. In support of the government's effort to contain the spread of this disease, Methodist churches across Singapore suspended worship services in church with effect from 22nd March 2020. Together with other churches, Toa Payoh Methodist Church (TPMC) faced the challenge of enabling her congregation to continue worshipping God as a community under such circumstances. Yet, despite the seemingly insurmountable odds, God prevails. Even though people could no longer attend church services on Sundays, the corporate worship of God has been brought into every home with technology. By broadcasting services online, Christians all over the world can continue to worship God and the gospel continues to spread to the ends of the earth. Let us find out how we have done it in TPMC.



CONCEPTUALISING THE ONLINE SERVICE

The replication of the church service onto an on-screen platform is not as easy as it looks. To overcome the lack of physical presence, the pastors and staff spent countless hours rethinking and tweaking the flow of the service, its duration and details like where and how to shoot certain segments in order to effectively engage the virtual congregation. Such concerns became significantly more pressing as we entered the Holy Week (5th to 12th April 2020). Notwithstanding the challenges, TPMC conducted her first ever Love Feast as part of the Maundy Thursday online service.



FILMING

Filming is where the ideas on paper are brought to life. Let us find out from Kok Tong and Clement on how this is done.

Interact: Hi guys, could you explain to us what goes into the preparation work before filming or recording a service?

Clement: I think there are two key considerations in delivering our services online – they have to be meaningful and engaging. To achieve them, there are two main areas of preparation. To make it as meaningful as possible, not only does the order of service have to be reworked, but the on-screen visuals also have to be carefully considered. This was especially evident during the Holy Week Services. In terms of engagement, we created a film set in our Sanctuary, and we thought of different ways of interacting with the virtual congregation.

Interact: Did you face any challenges at the beginning?

Kok Tong: Switching from the usual physical service to the on-screen platform was a totally different ball game to us. We lacked experience in stage lighting and video camera adjustments. It became a very steep learning curve for all of us as we attempted to get a more than satisfactory video recording. Most of the time, obtaining an optimal exposure and colour tone on the subject we were recording was a real challenge.



Interact: So what happens after you have completed the filming? Do you upload it onto our church website straightaway?

Kok Tong (Laughs): Hey, hold your horses, cowboy. After we have shot the service proceedings in different segments, we will go on to the next stage of production where we edit the footages and “stitch” the various segments together. For that, let us ask Pei Chia how it is done.



EDITING/ STITCHING

This phase, as we will soon see, is both creative and laborious.

Interact: Hi Pei Chia, can you explain to me what happens next?

Pei Chia: Sure! I use an editing software to “stitch” the various video footages into a single complete video according to the order of worship. This phase can be time-consuming as I will have to find the right point between different video footages and “stitch” them together to ensure that the transition is as seamless as possible. This includes checking for content accuracy in the titles and other presentations. Once that is completed, I will move on to enhance the video by performing colour grading, music

and audio mixing and creating special effects. Depending on the complexity, it can take 1 to 1.5 days to put together a one-hour video. The last step is to export the entire video into its final version for uploading, which can take up to 2 hours. If there are any mistakes or corrections to be made, I will have to repeat the process. Hence, I always aim to do it right the first time for every online service. Eric will explain the next and final step.

Interact: Wow, I did not know it takes so much time and effort to produce an online service.



BROADCASTING

Through broadcasting, the production team brings the service into your homes or wherever you are.

Eric (pushes up his nerdy glasses a little higher up the nose): What we do next is to “stream” the video file to every home via TPMC’s YouTube channel and Facebook concurrently. To perform the streaming, we must use specialized software and an online re-streaming service. We experimented with different video quality streams, hardware configurations and bandwidth utilization. Finally, we managed to find

the sweet spot where the audio and video quality are compatible with mobile devices, computers, and smart TVs.

Interact: Producing an online service is indeed an extensive process requiring courage, creativity, patience, and technical competency. Hats off to our production team!



TPMC Gives is a community initiative by the church to commemorate her 50th anniversary. We spoke to Roslyn, who led the initiative, to find out more.



WHAT ARE THE OBJECTIVES OF TPMC GIVES?

Through TPMC Gives, we wanted the church to move out as God's people to impact the community of Toa Payoh as she remembers how God has been faithful to her over the past 50 years.

With the event held just after Good Friday, where Jesus gave of his body and blood for the salvation of all, we wanted to re-present this symbolically through the acts of **bread distribution and blood donation**.

WHAT ACTIVITIES WERE PLANNED?

We planned for a bread distribution activity to be held on the Saturday after Good Friday, mobilising 200 volunteers to connect with our community by giving out bread to the residents of Toa Payoh and using the opportunity to invite them to church on Resurrection Sunday.

We also partnered with the Singapore Red Cross (SRC) for a blood donation drive to be held in the premises of TPMC on Resurrection Sunday. We hoped to develop this relationship with SRC to conduct annual blood donation drives as a way reaching out and staying relevant to the community in Toa Payoh.

WHAT WERE THE CHALLENGES IN ORGANISING TPMC GIVES?

With the emergence of COVID-19, our plans had to be changed by the week, and subsequently by the day. Many good-willed people suggested to us to call off the event, but we were very certain that **BECAUSE** of COVID-19, TPMC Gives must go on.

The challenge faced by the organising committee was not in finding alternatives but the increasingly tight timelines due to the changing safety measures put in place by the authorities. Consequently, we modified our plans accordingly, making sure that the events had to remain meaningful. We did our best and prayed.

With the implementation of the circuit breaker, we were not able to mobilise volunteers to distribute bread. Instead, the committee decided to show its appreciation to those who were fighting COVID-19 at the frontlines and maintain relationships with those working in or near Toa Payoh. To this end, we engaged a delivery company to deliver bread to doctors, nurses and staff of Tan Tock Seng Hospital and Toa Payoh Polyclinic, as well as bus captains and workers at Toa Payoh Bus Interchange. We also did not miss out cleaners from the town council who maintained the estate.



HOW WAS THE RESPONSE TO THE ACTIVITIES?

It was natural for people to be a little sceptical of blood donation drive that was held on 12 April 2020. Even SRC lowered their target collection from 80 to 60 bags of blood, in view of their first off-site blood donation drive during the circuit breaker period.

In the end, not 60, not 80, but 98 bags of blood were collected in the six-hour drive. All thanks and glory to God.

HOW DID GOD LEAD OR GUIDE YOU DURING THE ORGANISATION OF TPMC GIVES?

The planning and execution of TPMC Gives was very challenging due to the many safe-distancing measures that were introduced in the weeks leading up to the event. I am immensely grateful to a very tenacious committee that God had handpicked and put together. Though made up of just six individuals, this team of go-getters would not let the event be cancelled or postponed without having first considered all possible adjustments and modifications to the initial plans.

WHAT ARE YOUR THOUGHTS AND FEELINGS ABOUT TPMC GIVES?

God heard our prayers and blessed our five loaves and two fishes beyond what we could ever imagine, given the situation. The journey was indeed bumpy, one that literally demanded our blood, sweat and tears. I asked the committee if we would do it all over again. What I got was a resounding "Yes and Amen!"

To God be the Glory!



MOVING ONLINE

By Agnes Goh, Sarah Lim,
Pamela Pan

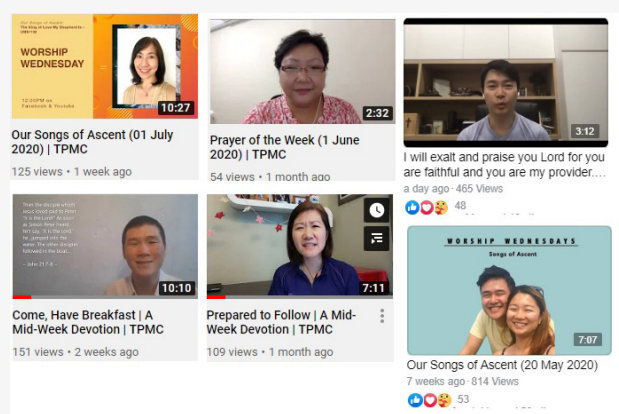


The Connected Church

Who would have imagined that one day we would not be able to gather in church for worship and fellowship? The building may be closed, but the church is always open. Technology has given the church a new dimension. The church is the gathering of God's people online.

When government measures were tightened because of the COVID-19 outbreak, Toa Payoh Methodist Church (TPMC) quickly adopted online platforms. Our Connect Groups (CGs) were the first to start meeting via video conferencing or messaging tools in late February and early March. Young and old quickly adapted and adopted Zoom or Whatsapp video calls, requesting and providing help when or where needed.

Many activities have also taken on a digital mode. A new initiative is the TPMC Rhythms on our social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram and Youtube. The aim of these weekly online engagements is to continue supporting spiritual disciplines like prayer (Meditation Mondays), worship (Worship Wednesdays), Bible reading and journaling, and Bible study (Teaching Thursdays).



Undoubtedly, online and digital meetings have limitations. Many of us miss having a meal together as a CG or lunch after Sunday service with church friends. Social interactions online may be awkward and unnatural, and some still struggle with limited IT know-how or equipment.

But with limitations come possibilities. We can continue to keep in touch while staying at home. We birth new ideas and creative ways of sharing the Gospel and developing discipleship. We can reach out to a larger audience who may never have stepped into a church building before.

Nonetheless, these changes should challenge us to pause and reflect on our responses. Some may not like the changes and wish for a return to the old ways. Others have settled into a disconnected contentment away from church. Still others have embraced new technology but chafe at social isolation.

What can help us manage change is to focus on the big picture — “What is the goal of the church?”. At the biblical level, Jesus’ commandment still stands — Go and make disciples of all nations. At TPMC, this commandment is translated to “Encounter to Love”. When we fix our eyes on the goal, anxieties, reluctance and frustrations give way to the imperative “Encounter to Love.”

Let us encounter God as we continue with our daily spiritual disciplines so that we will love others just as Jesus has demonstrated by loving us.



Children's Ministry

Christ is risen! He is risen indeed!

Christians usually use this greeting and response on Easter Sunday to declare Christ's resurrected power over death and sin and the new life that can be found in Him. This acclamation took on a new meaning for me this Easter.

Due to the worsening COVID-19 situation, all Children's Ministry activities had to cease on 15th March 2020. In the beginning, we provided parents with materials to go through with their children at home. But this option was not satisfactory. Firstly, we were not sure how many parents were using the materials. Secondly, we wanted to connect with the children and continue to be personally involved in their spiritual growth. This for me was the greatest push to look for an alternative solution. One evening, during a course on an online conferencing platform, it occurred to me that we could move our Children's Ministry online!

And thus began the journey for a few volunteers to experiment with various online conferencing platforms such as Zoom, Jitsi, Webex, Skype, etc. Finally, the team settled on Google Meet to connect with the children as most of them are already using this platform in school. With much excitement on Easter Sunday, we began our trial online classes with Primary Five and Six students.

"Hello! How are you doing?"

"Do you enjoy home-based learning?"

"What have you been doing during this Circuit Breaker period?"



The teachers were so happy to see the children and the hour passed quickly as we listened to their stories.

The trial online classes on Easter Sunday gave us the confidence to start more classes for other levels. Since Easter Sunday, we have held classes for children from K2 and above. So far, we have an average attendance of 60 children for our online classes. We hope to have more children join us. A regular session usually consists of worship, games, learning of God's Word as well as praying for one another. To date, we have covered the miracles of Jesus and are currently teaching His parables. The classes are conducted every Sunday (except the first Sunday of each month) from 9.30 am to 10.30 am.

As the pastoral staff overseeing the Children's Ministry (CM), I am so thankful to God for the support of the CM volunteers. Many of the volunteers were not conversant with online conferencing platforms prior to COVID-19. But because of their love for children, they overcame their technophobia and anxiety and stepped out in faith to serve the Lord. I am so proud of them!

"Christ is risen. He is risen indeed." God resurrected the Children's Ministry on Easter Sunday after its closure on 15th March 2020. We continue to look to Him to do wonders in our ministry.

Online Choir Practice

The multi-ministry taskforce in charge of combating COVID-19 announced the temporary suspension of all religious and congregation services on 24th March 2020. Following the suspension, the pastoral team focused on continuing worship services online. Learning from our experience in working with digital tools, I started to explore their use for the Jubilate Choir, in view of the upcoming 50th anniversary service. Encouraged by good examples such as The Blessing SG (a virtual choir comprising pastors, elders, worship leaders and choir members from different churches in Singapore singing the Aaronic blessing) and from other non-religious groups, I started experimenting with Zoom in June.

Online practice started on Zoom very slowly as many choir members were unfamiliar with the use of digital tools. There were also frequent issues with lag and latency making singing synchronization difficult. Nonetheless, we practiced online at least once a week, with each session usually lasting about an hour, due to the time limit for free usage of Zoom.

Apart from technical issues, we also had to adjust our approach to choir practice. For example, we normally start practice with physical and voice warm-ups. However, due to the time limit and lack of physical contact, choir members had to warm up by themselves prior to the session. As for me, aside from having a piano available, I prepared and tested the digital set-up before practice to minimise technical issues and enhance the training experience.



Despite the challenges to a virtual choir, there are benefits once we have experimented and become familiarized with the digital tools. Choir members are able to practice and fellowship together wherever we are. We are also able to invite former choir members who currently reside in other countries to join us. It was heart-warming to see choir members missing each other, having been kept apart due to the circuit breaker. There is definitely some truth to the proverb “absence makes the heart grow fonder”.

Virtual practice also allows choir members to better concentrate on their individual performances as they are able to isolate their own voices and specifically identify vocal tone improvements. Finally, choir formation is less of a concern in a virtual choir, with the focus being directed towards synchronising our voices to praise God.

I hope that this sharing will encourage all to believe that “God will make a way, where there seems to be no way.” (Don Moen) While circumstances and events may try to keep the body of Christ apart, God remains in overall control and will always make a way for us, and we only need to go to Him in obedience.

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FIND OUT MORE



“NOW TO HIM WHO IS ABLE TO DO
IMMEASURABLY MORE THAN
ALL WE ASK OR IMAGINE,
ACCORDING TO HIS POWER THAT
IS AT WORK IN US,
TO HIM BE GLORY IN THE
CHURCH AND IN CHRIST JESUS
THROUGHOUT ALL GENERATIONS,
FOR EVER AND EVER.
AMEN!”

(EPHESIANS 3:20-21)



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