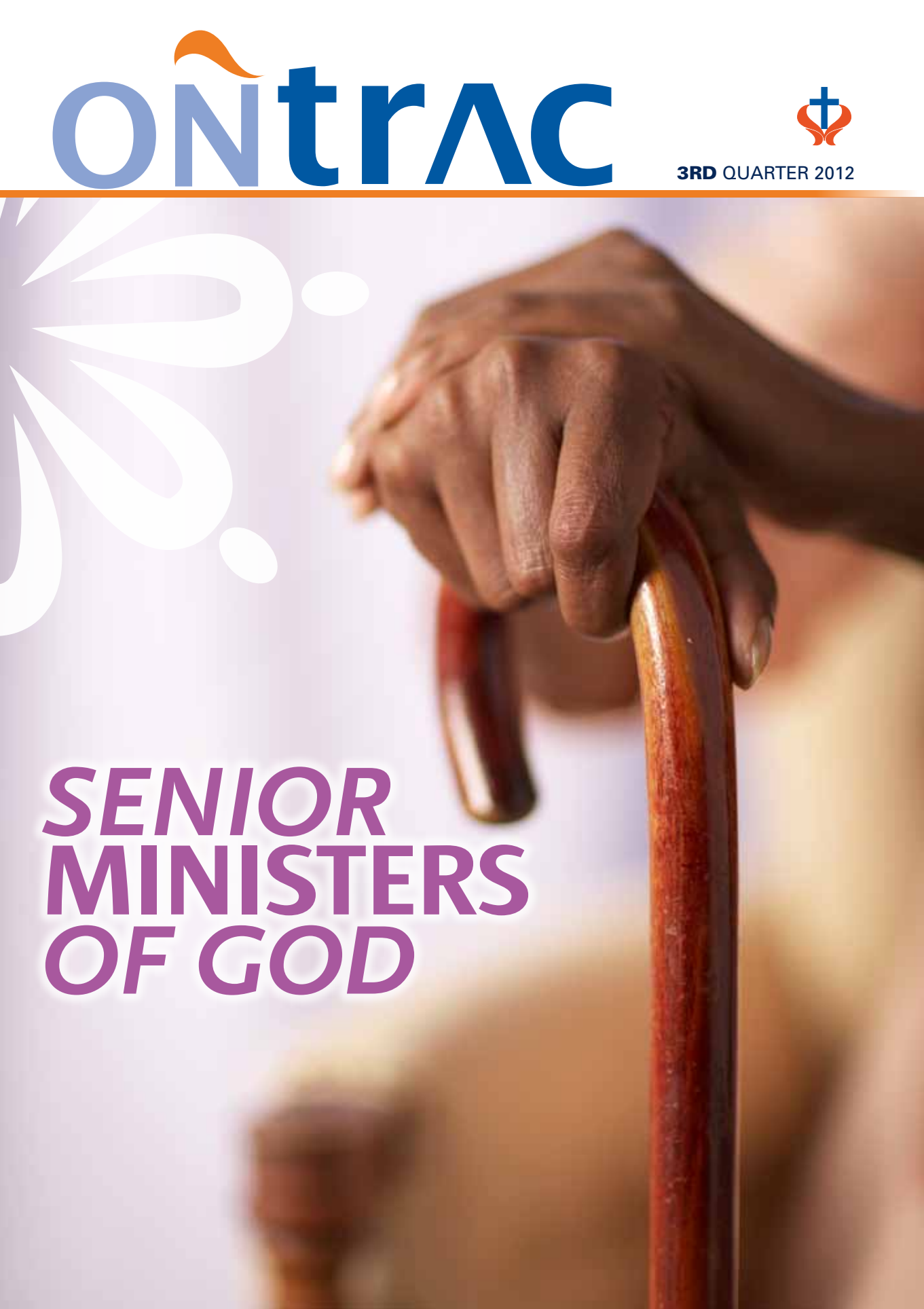




SENIOR MINISTERS OF GOD

TRAC President's Message

THE SENIOR AS MINISTER



Rev Dr Wee Boon Hup
TRAC President

Abraham was eighty years old when his son Ishmael was born. God's promised son, Isaac, had not yet been born. Even after Isaac was born, Abraham would live on a few decades more.

Moses was eighty years old when together with his brother Aaron, they approached the Pharaoh for the first time with demands to let God's people go. He was just starting to lead the people, and had not yet left Egypt. Like Abraham, he would have a few more decades before completing his life mission.

Caleb was eighty years old when he asked Joshua to give him the challenge of conquering that part of the Promised Land still occupied by the giant sons of Anakim. He was not about to sit back and let the younger ones fight the battles.

Although we might give consideration to the exceptional longevity of people during those times, these men were just about to enter the most exciting season of their lives at the start of their eighth decade. Abraham then lived to 175 years and Moses 120. Ministry had just begun for them.

There is no reason for seniors today not to emulate them. Advances in medicine and health care make it possible for us now to live longer. When we pay attention to taking care of the temple of the Holy Spirit (i.e. our physical body), God can continue to use us for His service way beyond our sixties.

There are also other motivations for us to continue in ministry as seniors. There is a growing greying

population in our society, and many of them have still not heard the gospel. It is going to be difficult for youth to reach seniors, though not impossible. Seniors reaching seniors – their own generation – is a more effective approach.

Seniors continue to make a positive contribution by their grand-parenting skills. When we look back to the decades of raising our children, we recall the struggles and near disasters, as well as the real ones, that we had to overcome. Our adult children can call upon us as a resource (though we can never take over their role as parents). This mentoring is especially essential when it comes to raising third generation disciples in our grandchildren. Our prayers and counsel (not interference) can serve them well.

Spiritual grand-parenting is also something to be encouraged – seniors mentoring those who mentor others. Not many 'younger' persons would approach seniors for such a relationship. It may be that they think seniors just want to have it easy in their retirement years, and hence would not approach them. It could

also be that they fear that the seniors would be out of touch with current developments and trends. Godly wisdom, however, is not generation-sensitive; it has timeless value. The generation that is wise will seek for it from the one that precedes it. The wise will find ways to pass it to the next generation.

Not all seniors will be physically able, like Caleb, to take up challenges that will tax their bodies. But there are many other kinds of ministries where the only physical work that is required is for the seniors to open and close their mouths – counselling, teaching, befriending, intercession, singing, etc.

Ministry by seniors therefore will form an essential component of the church of the future. Not only do they minister to other seniors. They will have much to give to later generations. A lot of effort has been given to create new ministries to attract and retain children and youth in our churches. But churches would do well to also find creative ways to get the seniors to serve actively in ministries. Most ministries among seniors in churches focus on letting them do things by themselves – bible studies, going on tours together, etc. The activities are among seniors themselves as if all the churches want to do is to keep these active seniors occupied, rather than seeing them being productive.

At the same time, seniors themselves need to keep learning and acquiring skills and experiences that will enable them to reach out to people of all ages. The tendency in our senior years is to have the attitude that you cannot teach old dogs new tricks. But the bottom line is this: if we want to continue in ministry, we must have something to offer that will meet the needs of that time. That comes only by being engaged, teachable and still amenable to change.



Not Old, but Spiritual: A young person's perspective

By Pastor Clarence Lee

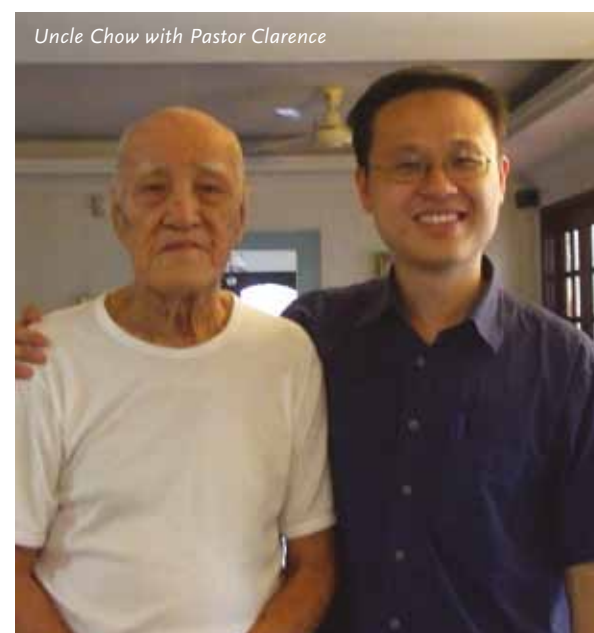
The recent Aldersgate Convention gave us a timely reminder on the spirituality of our ministry. We, in our culture and context, have focused so much on the pragmatics and on numbers, that the stories from our Sri Lankan speaker, Rev Duleep Fernando, really reminded us of the simplicity, and even impracticality sometimes, of a ministry that truly models Christ. Heeding such spiritual lessons can prevent the church from becoming too cold and corporate. Yet we need not only depend on our brothers and sisters from abroad to remind us of this. In fact, we have a treasure trove of spirituality amongst us, which we easily dismiss or are just too busy to listen to. They are our seniors. In fact, Rev Dr Keith Albans, serving with the British Methodist Homes for the Aged, recently challenged our pastors to rethink our definition of seniors: they should not be called "old", but "spiritual."

I recently hear of cases where children were being bullied at school, and had just begun thinking about how best to proceed in a Christian way, when I had a conversation with Auntie Koh.

Koh is 65, and she shared with me that when her son was young, she would attach key-chains to the zippers of his school bag for ease of use. One of her son's classmates would habitually rip it off, and even steal his stationery, but her son would not retaliate. This went on for some time, and Koh decided to pay the school a visit. I thought that she would complain to the teachers or principal, but no. She decided to speak with the boy during recess time and find out more about him. The bully was quite defensive at first, but was soon won over by her gentle and patient disposition. She found out that he was the only child of working parents and was alone most of the time. He admitted he often felt lonely and wished for a playmate. Koh understood his actions as really

inner cries for attention, but also explained to him gently that his actions were wrong. She then shared with him about Jesus and His love for him, and the boy listened intently. Somehow, Koh recounted, the boy changed after that day. This once notoriously ill-disciplined student went on to become a prefect in the school. And when Koh met him again in Secondary 4, he told her that he was now going to church. Without even asking, I had found my answer to dealing with bullies.

Then, there is Uncle Chow, 96, who always reminds me that each day of my life is really God's grace. During the Japanese occupation, he was called upon to make uniforms for the Japanese troops, which included headbands that carried the symbol of the emperor. When the uniforms were done, the Japanese discovered in their exercises that the



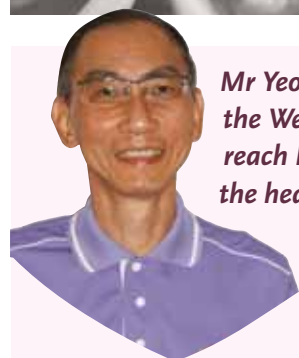
paint from their headbands started to fade. Chow was immediately called in. He was made to kneel before their regimental headquarters at Mount Faber from early morning till evening, awaiting death. He was not the one who painted the headbands, but there was no escape for him now. And yet, by God's divine intervention, Chow recounts, a Japanese sergeant actually came to his rescue. When the sergeant saw Chow's little daughter, he told him that he had a daughter back home of that age. In compassion, he appealed on Chow's behalf and secured his release. He even bought milk powder (a luxury at that time) for Chow's daughter. "That's how," Chow recounts, "my life was saved, and my daughter actually got to drink milk during the Occupation!" "To God be the glory!" repeats Chow, never failing to express that he is alive today only by the grace of God.

Spirituality and wisdom are often born out of life's experiences; and by virtue that they have lived longer, we would do well to listen to them. We shut out the voices of the "spiritual" only to our own peril. As Job tells us, "Wisdom is with the aged, and understanding in length of days." (Job 12:12) Consider this old Balinese legend as told by Henri Nouwen and Walter Gaffney¹:

It is said that once upon a time the people of a remote mountain village used to sacrifice and eat their old men. A day came when there was not a single old man left, and the traditions were lost. They wanted to build a great house for the meetings of the assembly, but when they came to look at the tree-trunks that had been cut for that purpose no one could tell the top from the bottom: if the timber were placed the wrong way up, it would set off a series of disasters. A young man said that if they promised never to eat the old men any more, he would be able to find a solution. They promised. He brought his grandfather, whom he had hidden; and the old man taught the community to tell top from bottom.



¹ Henri J. M. Nouwen and Walter J. Gaffney, *Aging: The Fulfillment of Life* (Doubleday: New York, 1990), p. 23.



Mr Yeo Pee Pin, a volunteer with the Wesley MC Befrienders' Outreach Programme (BOP), shares the heart-warming story of their friendship with Madam Yuen Fong Ling.

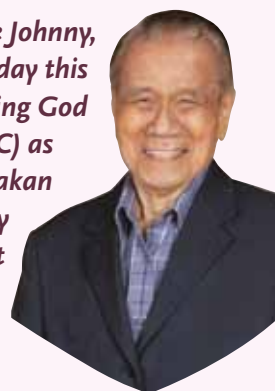
Madam Yuen is 90 this year. Friendship with her was established over the years since early 1990s. One of our pioneer volunteers, the late Mrs Ee, together with other BOP volunteers used to visit Madam Yuen and other elderly during the week to see to their personal needs. Even after Mrs Ee passed away, BOP volunteers continued with her good work and visited Madam Yuen regularly. They helped manage her medical appointments and accompanied her for medical check-ups. One volunteer even bought her a pair of sunglasses and arranged for her to have convalescence care at St Luke's Hospital after a cataract operation. On another occasion when the taps in her home were without water, some of our volunteers called the Public Utilities Board on her behalf and the problem was resolved within a few hours. She has shared with us how she was touched by the love and concern that our volunteers had shown towards her.

Salvation belongs to our God. Some of us may be called to plant the seed, and others to water it. In this instance, we are indeed grateful to God for enabling us to also reap the harvest! We rejoice that after many years of friendship with her, Madam Yuen eventually accepted the Lord Jesus Christ. All glory to God!



Madam Yuen on an outing with her BOP friends

Mr Johnny Chew or Uncle Johnny, celebrated his 86th birthday this year. He is faithfully serving God in Pentecost MC (PMC) as Co-ordinator of the Peranakan Ministry and as Honorary Steward. He shares about his service for God.



I went on a mission trip to Malang, Java organized by PMC GYM (Glowing Years Ministry), led by Rev Jimmy Wong from 19-23 May 2011. During the trip, I had the opportunity to visit the Sekolah Tinggi (High School) Alkitab Nusantara. The students were surprised that at 85 years old, I was still able to do God's mission. I also visit Mount Bromo to serve the unreached people there. We visited the sick and witnessed how some of them were healed through prayers by the power of the Holy Spirit. We also fed the poor and hungry. Before this trip, I also went on a mission trip to Batam (14-16 August 2010) with PMC GYM. During that trip, I had the opportunity to preach in the Methodist



Uncle Johnny with the mission team at Malang

Church in Anugerah, Batam. These mission trips allowed me to witness for Jesus Christ not only in Singapore but also in other countries, in obedience to His Great Commission.

As Peranakan Ministry Co-ordinator, I am currently involved in organizing the monthly Peranakan/ Indonesian Fellowship and occasional outings to reach out to Indonesian helpers. Being involved in these outreach programmes has enriched me spiritually by drawing me closer to God and shaping me to live my life dependent on God. They helped me to stay focused on what God wants me to do; instead of wasting time on meaningless activities. On a physical level, they also kept me in good health.



Auntie Swee Soo serving in love

Mrs Chen Swee Soo or Auntie Swee Soo, is from Living Hope MC (LHMC) and just celebrated her 87th birthday. She was born in Malaysia and studied at Methodist Girls' School. Mrs Chen once worked as a Medical Social Worker in several hospitals in Singapore. There she cared for the sick, the disabled, and the marginalised. In LHMC, she has served in the Pastor-Parish Relations and Staff Committee and is now Honorary Steward. She shares how she got involved in ministry.

It happened naturally. 27 years ago, I joined a tour group to China. During the trip, I became close friends with the other 25 ladies in the group. Five years ago, there were 11 of us left. Some had passed on, a few had migrated, and the rest were in bad health. Last year, only six of them turned up for our get together. I found that I was the only one active enough to move around by the grace of God. I therefore felt called to spend time with these friends of mine. This was how my caring ministry started.

They are lonely. Although they have children and grandchildren, these are too busy to spend time with them. Also, there is a big gap in communication and interests. They need to relate to people acquainted with their past. So when I visit, we talk about our school days, marriage and grandchildren, as well as their illnesses. We talk about the dying days of our late husbands, and how we coped with widowhood. We can remember vividly the Japanese occupation. We look through old photographs and talk about past events. We also talk about the present, about problematic relationships with their children, and daughters-in-law or sons-in-law. I try to bring comfort and peace to their midst. However, when we talk about the future, they will stop whenever I try to bring eternal life into the conversation. Sometimes, I would bring food such as fried carrot cake and char kway teow for them. Even though some were sickly, they would enjoy eating a few mouthfuls. For the past four years, I drove those on wheelchair to Chinatown on the 15th night of Lunar New Year and during the Mid-Autumn Festival for them to enjoy the sights and sounds.

The ladies I care for are staunch Buddhists. Some have children and grandchildren who are Christians but they have not been able to bring these ladies to Christ. Recently, one of these ladies (age 91) had a cough

Auntie Swee Soo serving in love



and experienced breathlessness for over a month despite receiving medical treatment. When I visited her, she suddenly wanted me to pray for her, saying “your God can heal me”. I was surprised, excited and fearful. I had never prayed in Cantonese. But I could not let my God down, or let the opportunity slip away. So I prayed in Cantonese the first time in my 87 years! Five days later, she called to say she was well after my prayer and now wanted to make a donation to my church. I was elated. She believed. God did His work. Now is the opportunity to reach out to her at last. However, when her Christian relatives heard about this they excitedly descended on her, pressurising her to go to church. She rebelled and got very upset. So now, I can only pray for her at home trusting God to complete what He had started.

Mr Chan Kai Yau, served in the Singapore Education Service, beginning as a teacher in 1955 and then as Director of Education from 1975–82. He was Secretary General of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations from 1982 to 1984. As a Justice of the Peace, he visits prisons and detention barracks, counsels inmates, and solemnizes marriages. He has kept himself active both in church ministries and in secular voluntary work.

It is good and even necessary for all of us to volunteer our services whether we are gainfully employed or retired from earning a living. Such services may take many different forms, be provided in many different places and be given to many different people. As Christians, let us remember Jesus’ command in Matthew 10:8 “freely you have received, freely give” and also His call to discipleship in Matthew 16:24 “If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me.”

By God’s grace, I was privileged to have the opportunity to volunteer my services both inside and outside the church. I was a founding member of the Varsity Christian Fellowship when it began in

1952 (while I was still an undergraduate), a founding member of the Campus Crusade for Christ Advisory Board in Singapore, and a founding member and the first local Secretary of the Scripture Union in Singapore.

Within The Methodist Church in Singapore (MCS), I was a member of the Local Church Executive Committee (LCEC) of Wesley MC (1956-62, 1965-73). After transferring to Barker Road MC (BRMC) in the mid-1970’s, I became a member of her LCEC in 1977. I was a former LCEC Chairman (1991-2003), and am now Honorary Steward. Years ago in the 1980’s, I was instrumental in forming the then Senior Fellowship in BRMC, and I am still connected with the Glowing Years Ministry as its Chairperson. Meanwhile, I was elected to the Trinity Annual Conference Executive Board, as a Delegate to the General Conference, and to the General Conference Executive Council. I served for 16 years as the Education Secretary for MCS, and concurrently as a member of the Anglo-Chinese School Board of Governors; and for 12 years as the General Conference Secretary. All through these years, I have conducted Bible studies in my cell group and for the Senior Fellowship.

***We thank God for our seniors who live a life of service to our Lord.
May they inspire us to give ourselves fully to His service!***



To An Xtraordinary Individual God is with you wherever the road leads you

Pastor Raymond Fong’s visit to an extraordinary fellowship

It was with much anticipation and excitement that I attended the Taxi Drivers’ Christian Fellowship at Living Hope MC. It was unusual to see so many taxis parked in the car park of the church but none was ready to pick up passengers. The drivers were committed to something more important.

A group of eight to ten men, mostly in their fifties, attending Living Hope MC and other churches, have been meeting once a month for the past two years to support and encourage each other in their journey of faith and their daily work. On some occasions as many as twenty would attend. The Fellowship would begin with praise and worship, followed by the sharing of the Word or a topic of interest, testimonies and concluding with prayer. A hearty time of fellowship over a simple supper would follow before the drivers head back to work on their night shifts.

When I met Albert Lee, the leader of the group, he gave me a card which publicizes the Fellowship. On it is the interesting proposal that “TAXI” is the acronym for “To An Xtraordinary Individual” and the assurance on the card is that “God is with you wherever the road leads you.” Indeed, these men carry this assurance and hope with them as they are being affirmed and

refreshed through their meetings and fellowship.

It turned out that I was deeply encouraged that evening. The usual programme took place and the highlight for me was the sharing of testimonies. One shared that a lady who boarded his taxi appeared troubled and she began to pour out her woes to him after he asked what was troubling her. It turned out that she is also a Christian and he was able to encourage and comfort her. Another shared how he was rudely told by a passenger to switch off his CD player because he was playing hymns and Christian songs. Despite this unpleasant experience, he continued to believe in being a daily witness for God in the way he drives and relates to his passengers. I was inspired by the courage of these men to shine for Christ in their many daily encounters with passengers. Their stories encouraged one another as well!

A strong sense of community prevailed over the meal we shared after the meeting. While enjoying the fellowship over a hot drink and light refreshments, they also had a birthday celebration with a cake. One of them was inviting the rest to join him for the church’s Alpha



course while another shared how he had refused to take part in a scheme which involved unethical practices. I was deeply encouraged by the friendship they shared as they help each other grow in spiritual maturity.

The meeting which started at about 9.30 p.m. ended just before 11 p.m. as the men returned to their taxis to continue their night of driving, refreshed by the Lord’s presence in their time of fellowship and meeting. As I reflect on my experience, this group exemplifies the goodness of working seniors and men in the same profession reaching out, supporting and encouraging each other to run the spiritual race well. It is also a powerful means of outreach as other taxi drivers are invited to join this community of faith. Indeed, it was a privilege for me to have an opportunity to attend one of the sessions.

May the Lord continue to bless this Fellowship and let it abound with love!

Adopt-a-Block: Outreach to the Community

By Rev Chan Siew Chye



Faith MC has been actively reaching out to people – including many senior citizens – in its residential vicinity. OnTRAC met up with Mr Patrick Chua, Senior Lay Ministry Staff (BridgeBuilders), to find out more.

It started nine years ago with five blocks at Tanglin Halt and five small groups (each adopting a block). This has since grown to 31 blocks with some 37 small groups involved. (Some blocks are adopted by two small groups due to their large number of units). Besides numerical growth, the Adopt-a-Block initiative has also extended its geographical perimeters beyond Commonwealth Drive, to the Dover area, where Faith MC currently has another worship venue. The demographics of these two communities vary – the population in Tanglin Halt comprises a high proportion of seniors, while those in Dover are typically middle-class nuclear families.



Relationship Building

An essential component of the Adopt-a-Block outreach is building relationships with the residents through regular visits by the same small group. Small groups make at least four visits a year to the blocks they adopt, namely on Lunar New Year, Easter, Mid-Autumn Festival and Christmas. These festive occasions provide opportunities for small groups to get to know the residents around Faith and to play a part in meeting community needs. On all visits, they will give out festive gifts to bless the residents with no strings attached.

Besides blessing the residents and at times being a listening ear to especially the seniors who live alone, the small group members also play a bridging role between the church and the community.

The close-to-a-decade-long outreach to the community has also led to an increased interest in the Christian faith from residents, especially Mandarin-speaking seniors living in the adopted blocks. In response to this interest from residents as well as from parents of members, Faith MC launched her first Mandarin Service in September

2011. Since its inauguration, the attendance of the Mandarin Service has steadily grown and it has provided another avenue for residents to connect with the church.

Challenges

Reaching out to the seniors in the neighborhood is not without challenges. At the start, small groups were hesitant to commit to Adopt-a-Block due to language and social barriers. Time commitment was also another major obstacle. However, with guidance on managing time and expectations, coupled with encouraging testimonies from the pioneer groups, more and more small groups are coming on board to reach out to the community.

The question faced by many small groups after spending much time building relationships with the residents is often: "What's next?" Trust has been built through years of visits and the residents are more receptive and even thankful for the visits and gifts. With the start of the Mandarin Service, there are now more touchpoints and platforms for the residents to connect with each other and the church.



Some of the small groups felt that they could not connect with the residents on a deeper level with just four visits each year. Hence, many took the initiative to visit apart from the required seasons, which at times involved fulfilling the practical needs of the residents – such as helping them to receive financial assistance, painting the residence, providing a new wardrobe and such. Love in action overcomes all forms of barriers and helps to foster stronger relationships between the residents and small group members.

Well-Being of the Community

Reaching out to the community is more than providing them with information about the message of God's love. It is about improving their well-being and helping them experience God's love through the family of God in Faith MC. As the church seeks to be a blessing to the community, the church is also blessed as the family of God grows together to be more like Jesus through their journey of loving the community. This journey is full of ups and downs but she will move forward with perseverance.



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