

Bishop's Episcopal Address (2019)

My dear co-workers, delegates, pastors, brothers and sisters in Christ,

Peace and joy to you in the Lord! May His grace and love be with you always!

The Annual Conference brings us together every year for communion and fellowship, to learn from each other, evaluate past ministries, and plan our future direction. I do not know how you feel about coming here for this grand meeting, but I hope you are filled with love and care for the ministries of CMCA, caring for one another, and cooperating with one another to fulfil the commission God has given CMCA for this moment in history.

I thank God for His calling, and last year's delegates for their support, in entrusting your humble servant to serve as Bishop of CMCA 2019-22. After I was elected, I said in my maiden speech: "I fully understand that without the help and strength from our Almighty God, and without the assistance and unity of everyone, it would not be an easy undertaking at all. Therefore, we truly need to rely on God's wisdom, direction and strength. Every one of us needs to pray fervently for CMCA, so that we can rely on His strength to carry out His will." I further called upon everyone: "We truly need to work together as a team. We may not have the same view on all things but let us be of the mind of Christ for the mission God has given to CMCA."

Every week this year your humble servant sent a prayer list to the Executive Board members, co-workers of the all three districts, and members of the Council of Episcopacy, asking them to pray in unity, to seek His help and strength. I have had fellowship and prayer times with the three District Superintendents using ZOOM and attended the District pastoral prayer meetings as often as I can.

I. 2019-22 Theme: "Building a church after God's own heart."

This theme has been my goal and direction throughout the twenty plus years of my pastoral ministry. I have, therefore, set it as the 2019-22 theme for the Annual Conference. To build a church after God's own heart, we must not merely follow human opinions, but be faithful to the Scriptures, to learn from the teachings of Jesus, the model of the early church, and the instructions of the apostles. What kind of church is a church after God's own heart? I have listed five points in the first issue of the Methodist News this year (below). After much prayer, thinking, and seeking God's will, I would like to share with fellow church pastors and leaders a few practical steps for action. I hope my fellow church pastors and leaders would mobilise the congregation in the coming days to build a church after God's own heart, expand God's kingdom and glorify His name.

(1) A Church that pursues unity in One Spirit

The desire of Jesus is for Christians to pursue unity. According to the Gospel of John chapter 17, in His final parting prayer, the Lord Jesus pleaded with the Father specially for the unity of the disciples and for the unity of the church through the age: "And I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, keep them in your name, which you have given me, that they may be one, even as we are one. I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one ..." (John 17:11, 20-21a). Church disunity brings shame to the name of the Lord, causes our brothers and sisters to stumble, and destroys the work of the church. Only a church in unity can prosper the gospel, develop ministry, and glorify God's name.

In Ephesians 4:1-6, Paul reminded believers to maintain the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace. He taught us to do so "with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." I hope all pastors and believers would

strive to maintain the unity in the Lord. Pray that God will help us to have a spirit of self-denial and self-sacrifice. For John Wesley, self-denial is denying or refusing to follow our own will, from a conviction that the will of God is the only right way.

Practical steps:

- **Dealing with self:** “Live in harmony with one another. Do not be haughty.” (Romans 12:16) In order to maintain unity, we should not be haughty, the original text means ‘not to contemplate things that make you arrogant.’ We need to be strict with ourselves and restrict ourselves. Self is an obstacle in striving for unity. This can be easily observed – some leaders are unwilling to work together because the resolution passed does not suit him/her. If pastors and church leaders are all seeking their personal interests, power and glory, then how can brothers and sisters work together with us to serve our Lord Jesus? Pray that God will grant us the attitude of John the Baptist: “He must increase, but I must decrease.” (John 3:30) Here I urge every pastor and church leader to be still before God, to reflect and evaluate your motive for serving God, and the measures you adopt in dealing with people and matters, etc.
- **Follow the Book of Discipline:** The Book of Discipline is an important document for the administration of the Methodist Church. It not only enables us to pass on the spirit and tradition of the Methodist revival movement and early Methodism, it helps the church today to achieve common actions and direction when administering various ministries. One pastor put it well: “The function of the Book of Discipline is to enable us to know the spirit and covenant of the church and fellowship, so that we proceed methodologically to promote harmony and unity, manifesting the lives of His disciples.” Therefore, I suggest all pastors and church leaders should be familiar with the Methodist Book of Discipline and carry out church ministries in line with the Book of Discipline, for it is the blueprint for administration of the church.

(2) A church that prays together in one spirit

It is also Jesus’ desire for Christians to pray together in one spirit. When Jesus was cleansing the temple in the final week, he said to those who were buying and selling there, “It is written, ‘My house shall be called a house of prayer,’ but you make it a den of robbers.” (Matthew 21:13) So we see Jesus wants the church today to be united in prayer. In Matthew 18:19 Jesus gave a promise to those who are united in prayer – Jesus said, “If two of you agree on earth about anything they ask, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven.” Here we see the importance of believers praying together in unity. After Jesus ascended into heaven, the first gathering of the believers was in a prayer meeting where everyone prayed in one spirit and it brought about the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. According to the book of Acts, we see that the early church put a great emphasis on prayer. Thus, at that time, God performed many miracles through the apostles, thus expanding the ministries of the church.

John Wesley gave high priority to personal and corporate prayer life. During his lifetime, every morning for over fifty years, he always prayed between four and five in the morning. In his journal, we can always see him seizing the opportunity to round up his friends and travel companions to pray before breakfast. This is because Wesley firmly believed prayer is a means of grace. I hope our believers would also give priority to prayer and participate in united, corporate prayer.

Practical steps:

- **Burden for our own personal prayer:** To build a church that prays together in one spirit, we must first build the leaders’ personal prayer life. If CMCA leaders themselves do not give priority and commit to building their personal prayer lives, do not participate in prayer meetings, or pray

with other leaders at fixed times, then the pastors' call alone, would fall on deaf ears. I suggest pastors and church leaders study seriously books on prayer, to instil the burden for personal prayer; and to be willing to watch over one another through praying with two or three spiritual partners, so as to encourage and support each other; and be willing to make time to participate in church prayer meetings. Further, hope to be able to build weekly family prayer time. Christian parents and children should train not just to pray for your own needs, but also to bring before God the various ministries of the church, the salvation of non-believers, problems in the society today, and missions work around the world.

- **Renewing content of prayer meetings:** Encourage each prayer meeting to have a clear theme and focus. (E.g. week 1: church evangelism and discipleship ministries; week 2: church fellowship and family ministries; week 3: annual and district conference ministries; week 4: local and overseas missions etc.). Prayer meetings with rich content will have contented participants. Furthermore, arrange for regular 5 to 10-minute testimonies, especially testifying to the power of prayer. One can also consider holding combined churches prayer meetings twice a year. Pastors and church leaders need to be willing to spend time to plan and prepare to renew the content of prayer meetings, and to make every prayer meeting a priority.

(3) A church that cultivates Disciples

It is Jesus' command for Christians to cultivate disciples. Before ascension, Jesus gave His disciples the Great Commission, "Go and make disciples of all nations." Jesus mentioned three times in John regarding three characteristics of the life of a disciple: (i) Holding to His teaching (8:31); (ii) Loving one another (13:35); (iii) Bearing fruits (15:8). One of the purposes of the church is to proclaim the gospel and make disciples, so that they would testify for the Lord and subsequently produce many more disciples. The believers of the early church truly experienced "the Lord adding to their number day by day, those who were being saved." The early Christians must have been zealous in sharing the gospel. When Lord Jesus added the number, the apostles nurtured these believers so they devoted themselves to the teaching. During Paul's missionary journey, he went back to the churches he planted to strengthen and encourage the disciples to remain true to the faith (Acts 14:22). In Colossians 2:6-7, Paul also taught us that after believers received Christ, they still need to be "rooted and built up in Him and established in the faith and overflowed with thankfulness." Therefore, churches should take evangelism, training and equipping ministries seriously.

John Wesley clearly knew that a mature spiritual life does not result solely from preaching. He realised that those who accepted Christ through preaching should be trained promptly. This is also one of his purposes in establishing the club. Subsequently, as the number of believers increased, He then established classes and small groups to nurture and foster the spiritual growth of these new believers. I hope CMCA church members do not only attend discipleship training, but also lead others to Christ and nurture the growth of new believers.

Practical steps:

- **Reorient the direction of discipleship:** CMCA has been implementing discipleship ministry for many years. There are many who have completed Red, Green, and Purple Discipleship Training. Some have also completed the Gold Discipleship training. However, how many students who have attended these courses have actively evangelized and cultivated new believers to become disciples of the Lord, and subsequently train the others to spread the gospel and help others with their spiritual growth. Jesus' command -- "Go and make disciples of all nations" -- is for us to understand and experience the vision of multiplication. When multiplication occurs, it will then fulfil what is

taught in 2 Tim 2:2, “And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable people who will also be qualified to teach others.” Therefore, I would encourage every church to establish gospel teams to regularly reach out and spread the gospel to their friends. Other than gospel teams, there should also be follow-up teams which provide new believers with at least three months of training. Churches should consider training more believers to participate in gospel-sharing and follow-up ministries, instead of only focussing on passing and gaining knowledge without any practical action.

- **Reorganize the direction of Fellowship gatherings:** At present, most fellowships place emphasis on programs. Undeniably, programs are important, but they should be used as an approach to achieve the objectives of the Fellowship. The aim of fellowship is to lead non-believers to learn about God’s salvation, to help fellow Christians to become better disciples. Bible studies do not only provide opportunities to study God’s Word, but also to equip Christians in order to nurture new believers. According to Rev Rick Warren, “authentic fellowship is genuine, heart to heart sharing. They share their hurts, reveal their feelings, confess their failures and acknowledge their weaknesses, and ask for help and prayer. It is only as we become open about our lives that we experience real fellowship.” Fellowship gatherings are not for the purpose of making programs, but for genuine interaction and the betterment of our life, including the new life given to us by Christ, to influence others to know our God.

(4) A Church that lives out the love of God

It is also Jesus’ command for Christians to live out the love of God. Jesus told us: “This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.” (John 15:12) The Apostle Peter also told us, to reinforce our brotherly affection with love (2 Peter 1:7). Paul taught us that love is the norm for all Christian conduct. He emphasized in Romans 13:9-10 that love does no harm to a neighbor and does good to others, which is summed up in one command: “Love your neighbor as yourself.” In 1 Thessalonians, he described labor as the concrete demonstration of love (1 Thess. 1:3). There is a rich meaning of *labor* in this context, such as ‘hard work’, ‘difficulty’, or ‘trouble’ etc. What Paul meant was that people who love God are willing to endure the hard work, to confront difficulties, and to face troubles. Our glorious God rebuked the church of Ephesus for forsaking the love they had at first (Rev 2:4). A church after God’s own heart is a church that lives out the love of God.

It is John Wesley’s belief that both works of mercy and works of piety are God’s means of grace. His idea of service is to “do all you can, by all the means you can, in all the ways you can, in all the places you can, at all the times you can, to all the people you can, as long as you can.” I hope that all Christians of CMCA would genuinely live out their faith and show their care towards their neighbours in the community. However, please pay attention to the term ‘as long as you can.’ In reality this does not mean that we unconditionally support all requests to CMCA. There is no necessity to carry on with any unsustainable ministries despite prolonged and sufficient support. The Annual Conference has the power to determine which ministries are given the priority.

Practical steps:

- **Showing concerns within the body of Christ:** A church that lives out the love of God shows concern towards those who are hurt, troubled, bound by sins or those who suffer from emotional disorder etc. Pastors and church leaders should be equipped with counselling skills to enable them to better understand the inner feelings of the church members and the struggles they are facing. In this way, they can offer individual assistance, care, support, encouragement, to minister them, and provide spiritual guidance. If pastors are unable to provide professional counselling, they should refer their members to suitable Christian counselling services.

- **Establishing Methodist Care Centre in the community:** CMCA should consider establishing a Methodist Care Centre to enhance our social concerns ministry. This can be implemented by gathering resources from all churches and seeking government subsidies. Some of the examples include setting up English classes for new migrants or organising health and wellbeing activities for children, youths, or the elderly etc. Our Board, Commissions and Committees on Christian Social Concerns should further explore the feasibility of these ministries.

(5) A church that is actively involved in global missions

Christians should not only participate in the ministries of their own church. God wants us to spread the good news of His love for the world to the ends of the earth. Jesus went to all the towns and villages to spread the Heavenly gospel. He never restricted it to certain races, classes, religions or any other subcultures. Jesus did not only spread the gospel to the Jews, but he pointed out that the field of Samaritans were ripe for harvest. He reminded His disciples that “This gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations.” (Matthew 24:14) He promised His disciples that they will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on them and instructed them “to be his witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” (Acts 1:8) It is evident, therefore, that God’s will is for all the nations and all the people in the world to share in His Kingdom.

Paul received God’s calling and commitment since his encounter with God on the road to Damascus. He then explained that, “[God] gave us the ministry of reconciliation... And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation.” (2 Cor 5:18-19). During his many missionary journeys throughout his life, he had a clear goal: “All that I do is for the sake of the gospel, to share the benefits of this gospel with others.” (1 Cor. 9:23)

After John Wesley’s Aldersgate experience, he proclaimed that, “The World is My Parish”. We know that: “The World is My Parish” does not initially refer to overseas missions. His idea was to call the churches to engage in evangelistic work, which is to spread the gospel with others in the country and at all places. No Methodist missionary was sent overseas until 1771 when John Wesley sent Francis Asbury to North America. Later, at the beginning of the 19th century, the British Wesleyan Churches and the American Methodist Churches actively participated in overseas missionary work. Since then, Methodist Churches were established around the world.

There are still many people in the world who have not heard of the gospel of God. It is not right for us to ignore when we have the whole world as our mission field. Other than sending a few short-term mission teams on mission trips, we are looking forward to have our own missionaries from CMCA to carry out overseas missions one day.

Practical steps:

- **Cultivating ‘World Christians’:** In order to carry out missions ministry, there is a need to educate Christians about it. The church holds the responsibilities of preaching and educating believers about global mission, so they can be ‘world Christians’. We should educate Christians to establish a firm biblical concept and belief about missions before they practise it. In this regard, I would recommend two courses:
 1. “Kairos” Course on Missions - It provides a comprehensive and concrete teaching about missions with interesting and compelling testimonies.
 2. “Challenging Vision” Course on Missions - Currently the simplest and comprehensive fundamental mission course. It includes four main components, namely Biblical Foundations of Missions, History of Missions, Stepping Across Cultural Boundaries, and Life Strategies. It

aims to ignite Christians' passion and to build right perspectives towards global missions.

It is encouraged that churches would cultivate "World Christians."

- **Cultivating 'Missionary by Profession'**: This means entering the mission field with one's profession. They and their family financially support themselves with an occupation of their own profession while spreading the gospel and planting churches in their local community. This group of missionaries is in demand nowadays as full-time missionaries are not welcomed in many Islamic countries, Communist countries or dictatorship countries. However, professional foreigners are widely accepted for work or investment, and thus this is a great avenue for mission to take place in these nations. Current global trends provide Christians with many international and intercultural job opportunities. This is where we can take the opportunities to serve with our professions. The Board on Missions is encouraged to seriously consider cultivating more 'missionaries by profession'.

II. Sub themes of 2019-2022

(1) 2019 – "Abiding in the Lord to bear much fruit."

The starting point of building a church after God's own heart is the connection between the lives of brothers and sisters with God. In John 15, Jesus repeatedly mentioned the need of the disciples to bear much fruit (John 15:2,5, 8). He hoped that God's children would be able to bear fruits luxuriantly and live an abundant and victorious Christian life. Jesus said: "You must abide in me". Jesus very clearly commanded: "If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit.... This is my Father's glory that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples." (John 15:7-8)

A Christian who abides in the Lord must abide in the words of the Lord. Jesus said: "If you remain in me and my words remain in you...." (John 15:7). The best means of allowing Jesus to remain in us is to allow his words to infiltrate our thoughts, souls and emotions. The pioneer of Methodist Church, John Wesley, paid strong emphasis on the reading and studying of the Bible with a heart of worship and to listen to the word of God with a reverent attitude.

A Christian who abides in the Lord must also abide in the love of the Lord. Jesus said: "As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love." (John 15:9). Another good means of allowing Jesus to live in us is to allow his love to motivate and lead our lives. A Christian who abides in the Lord does not only become a Christian in the Church on Sunday but rather he would always obey the Lord's commands in his work place, in his family, in thoughts, in will and even in places where he can't be seen by anyone.

Only when Christians allow the word of the Lord to fill our thoughts, souls and emotions; and allow the love of the Lord to motivate and lead our lives, then can we bear much fruit for the Lord. What type of fruits can we bear? The New Testament mentions at least 4 types of fruits: Fruit of the spirit (Gal 5:22-23); Fruit of praise (Heb 13:15); Fruit of good work (Col 1:10); Fruit of soul-winning (Rom 1:13; 1 Cor 16:15).

God does not only want us to be more Christlike, to praise Him in words and songs, and to do good deeds in action. The ultimate purpose of God in allowing us who have been saved to remain in this world is that we would be His spokespersons and to live a good testimony to win souls for God.

Hopefully "Abiding in the Lord to bear much fruit" will not be our objective for this year alone. A Christian should consistently establish a good relationship with God and to bear much fruit throughout his/ her life.

(2) 2020 -- "Building healthy families to serve the Lord."

Building a church after God's own heart would also require recognizing the importance of building a healthy family. The church is made up of many family units. If family units are healthy the church would then be able to be after God's own heart. A "healthy family" refers to a family with God as the centre. It is a Christ-orientated family which does and acts in accordance to the biblical truth.

Whenever a family encounters problems without and within, and family members are oppressed or bonded by sins, it would become impossible for them to fully commit to church ministries.

When God created man, He also instituted the family. This was good originally. However, in this day and age it is saddening to see numerous family tragedies such as estranged couples, discord amongst siblings, rebellious children etc. More and more families today are embroiled in complicated marital relationship. As such they have deviated from the original desire of God when He instituted the family. In the midst of family dissolutions, a church after God's own heart must help Christians to rebuild biblical family view, to nurture fervent parents, to materialise the passing-on of one's faith, and to practise whole household serving the Lord. Hopefully more families in our Church would be able to say: "But as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord." (Jos 24:15)

In his sermon "On Family Religion", John Wesley emphasized the importance of marriage, family and up-bringing of children. Even though he himself did not have a happy marriage, his suggestion is still useful. This is because he understood the biblical teaching, and from his mother Suzannah, he understood that parents are responsible for the development of the children's faith. In that particular sermon he mentioned that parents are responsible for imparting spiritual knowledge to their children and moulding their spiritual life. Apart from this he also felt that parents must guide their children so that their careers and marriage lives would please the Lord.

In order to help Christians in our church to rebuild biblical family view and to nurture fervent parents, I suggest that the Board of Christian Education and also the Commissions of Christian Education in various District Conferences organize activities such as seminars and talks on these subjects, marriage enrichment retreats and children character camps. Apart from these, we would encourage each church to promote reading books on these subjects; to select small group Bible study topics for one quarter to be based on family-related subjects; also to organize family camps.

In order to materialize the passing-on of one's faith and to practise whole household serving the Lord, I suggest that every church should seriously promote family altar, train parents in their role to shepherd their children, and at the same time nurture the parents to establish intimate relationships with their children. Families can even carry out discipleship ministry even in the home. In addition, parents should be encouraged to worship together with their children and to participate together in church ministries even to the extent of the whole family going on a short mission trip.

At the moment, the Chairperson of the Board of Christian Education and the Youth Director are busy with their own parish responsibilities, and so it is difficult for them to spend more time thinking, planning, training and organizing children ministry, teenagers and youth ministry as well as family ministry. Probably the District Conference or the Local Conference should consider the possibility of employing full-time co-workers dedicated to family ministry, children ministry, teenagers and youths ministry.

(3) 2021 -- "Caring for the community to reach the lost."

Building a church after God's own heart would also require recognizing the importance of caring for the community so as to reach the lost. From both the Old Testament and the New Testament, we see passages pertaining to the participation of God's children in social concern. Micah 6:8 "He has shown you, O mortal, what is good. And what does the LORD require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God". Learning to do good deeds and loving mercy are actions of participation in social concern. Acting justly is a kind of manifestation of social works. In Matthew's gospel the Lord Jesus taught his disciples: "In the same way, let your light shine before others, that

they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.” (Matt 5:16). In the parable of the good Samaritan, Lord Jesus taught us to love our neighbours as ourselves (Luke 10:27). Jesus himself set a good example by going through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and healing every disease and sickness. When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them. (Matt 9:35-36)

The social ideology of John Wesley had been constantly provoking him to turn from fervent activities to works of compassion. In so doing he was extending from personal holiness to social holiness. In the process of launching out into works of compassion, he showed his concern for others – especially the poor – by advocating for their welfare and justice.

Believers participate in social concern activities out of God’s love and peoples’ need. Regardless of whether the receiving ends are Christians or non-Christians, Christians must show their concern with love. Nevertheless, apart from showing concern for the welfare of people, there is another commission and concern which could not be neglected by Christians, that is, to be concerned for peoples’ souls, to be concerned for the relationship between man and God, and to be concerned about people receiving salvation through repentance and belief.

In order to integrate into the community, apart from continuing blood donation campaigns, rendering assistance in crisis relief, and ministry of concern for the poor, we can also consider these possibilities: setting up children music classes, Methodist child-care centres, English conversation classes for new migrants, Methodist primary schools, and activity centres for senior citizens. Hopefully Christian Social Concerns Board would develop a workable plan to participate in social concern.

(4) 2022 – “Equipping the church to engage with cross-cultural missions.”

Building a church after God’s own heart would also require equipping the church to participate in missions. The church should be involved in global missions ministries because our God whom we worship and serve is a God of missions. God is not concerned about the chosen Israelites alone but rather the whole of mankind. God sent his begotten son into the world due to his concern about the needs of mankind. He paid the price to redeem man from the power of sins and to bestow on them an abundant life. Moreover he gave them the great commission of making disciples of all nations.

One of the reasons why the disciples of early church were able to preach the gospel earnestly was because they hoped that the Lord Jesus would return in their lifetime. In Matthew 24:14, Jesus personally said to his disciples: “And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come”. Today, have we lost the earnest longing for the Lord’s return? The Bible clearly stated that in the last days there would be lots of calamities many of which have come to pass. If we truly believe that the return of the Lord is at hand, we should be concerned about the lost souls and pay heed to equipping the church for missions and evangelism.

To equip the church for missions ministries, the following suggestions are food for thought:

- Firstly, through listening to sermons and reading of literature on missions, participation in missions courses or missions camps, believers should be nurtured to have a vision and burden for global missions and evangelism.
- Secondly, encourage believers to join evangelistic teams of the church and be trained in personal evangelism. If a believer is not active in personal evangelism locally, it would be impossible for him to do so in missions fields.
- Thirdly, encourage believers who are active in personal evangelism locally to join missions teams of the church and be practically trained in short missions trips.
- Fourthly, encourage believers who have a burden for long term missions ministries to pray and identify the people whom they want to serve in the future. In so doing, while in the home ground, they can learn the language and culture of the targeted missions subjects, and participate in evangelistic ministries for these people.
- Fifthly, the Missions Board must budget for the living expenses (3-4 years) of future long term

missionaries. At the same time, the Board should set up a committee dedicated to identifying and assessing suitable candidates for missions ministries.

- Sixthly, our church should also consider cross cultural missions in the local scene in Australia. This is because there are many migrants such as Vietnamese, Cambodians, Japanese, etc who have yet to hear the gospel. Probably different churches can adopt different migrant groups as a target of missions and evangelism.

III. Nurturing second-generation English-speaking preachers

We are always short of English-speaking preachers. Therefore, we are trying our best to nurture more of our second generation to take up the role of English ministry preachers. I hope we can offer a basic theological course to our second-generation youths through Logos Academy for Ministry and Missions (LAMM) courses. LAMM is set to provide Associate Diploma in Christian Ministry in 2020-2022. It consists of ten 15-hour courses which include NT Survey, OT Survey, Biblical Interpretation, Christian Spirituality, Christian Leadership, Church History, Christian Worship, Introduction to Theology, Methodist Studies, Christian Ethics. The lecturers will come from our CMCA pastoral team.

The purpose of this program is to provide participants with basic theological education in order to enable them to be more effective in their Christian witness and ministry. This may also help to prepare some of them to take up further theological training to prepare themselves as full-time workers for the Lord. We hope all pastors and church leaders will help to encourage our youths to attend these courses.

In addition to this, when Reverend Elijah Chew recommended the 2-year Internship Ministry Training Strategy to the Board on the Ministry, I couldn't agree more. Every local church can choose one or two volunteers to join this programme. During the weekends, they will need to attend training with their respective pastors and then serve in the ministry arranged for them. At the same time, the church will need to provide them with some financial support. I believe through this programme, youths can further understand their calling and find out if God wants them to go into full-time ministry. Details will be further discussed at the Board on the Ministry.

IV. Other Matters:

(1) Fundraising for Theological Education Student Subsidies

We are thankful that all Churches have arranged to collect a second offering during the Theological Education Sunday Service in order to support this particular funding for theological students. Sister Yee She Lee will be graduating this year and will be going into full-time ministry. Next year we still have three theological students: Jacob Law, Vincent Ling and Johnny Hii. We hope there will be more joining us. The Executive Board has also decided to hold a 25th Anniversary Thanksgiving service on the 29th of November 2019 to raise some money for the Theological Scholarship Fund. We aim to raise AUD20,000 and we sincerely hope that everyone can give a helping hand.

(2) ABN Matter

During the Executive Board meeting in March this year, it was resolved that each local church can register their own ABN. However, all local churches under CMCA are still required to operate according to the Book of Discipline. Therefore, to ensure that every local church continue to follow the Methodist Book of Discipline (that local churches do not go their own separate ways after receiving their ABN), we recommend that each local church should sign a memorandum of understanding with the Annual Conference in which they agree that: "Each local church will follow the CMCA Book of Discipline indefinitely; No church should employ any pastor without the approval of the Board on the

Ministry; Each local church should submit their Annual Contribution to the Annual Conference; and any property purchased by local churches belongs to the Annual Conference.”

(3) To increase the CMCA office staff

At the moment there is only one staff (brother Benjamin Hii) in our Annual Conference office who is in charge of all financial and administrative matters of the Conference. He also needs to coordinate other special events and functions like LAMM courses, rental of the Methodist House, printing of Methodist News, compiling the statistics of Discipleship classes and arranging training for Discipleship facilitators. I realized that his workload is way too heavy, hence I would like to propose to employ another staff to share the workload.

In order for the Annual Conference to grow more effectively, the Board of Christian Social Concerns and Board on Missions should consider to employing a part-time staff in 2021 and 2022 to help promote their respective ministries.

(4) Strengthening AC Financial Management

We are grateful that most local churches have submitted their annual contribution on time. So far, our income is mainly from this annual contribution and also from the rooms we rent out at the Methodist House. Each church will continue to give their Easter Sunday offerings to Annual conference for operating expenses. Other than that, the offerings from Laity Sunday, Mission Sunday and Theological Education Sunday (the second offering) are submitted to help promote each respective ministry. We hope that all the churches will willingly submit their annual contribution and designated offerings on time, and do specify the church’s name and the purpose for the contribution when doing the bank transfer so as to minimise confusion for the Annual Conference treasurer. We will definitely need more funds if we are to increase the number of staff in the AC office. I sincerely hope that the Board of the Finance can take this into consideration and come up with a feasible plan.

(5) Trip to the Holy Land (10-20th January 2020)

I will personally lead a team of 42 people to Israel and Jordan in mid-January next year (10th-20th) for a 11-day trip of faith. Most of the members are from Australia District South. This trip is arranged by the Livingstone Agency in East Malaysia. Please do keep us in your prayers that we all can have a safe and fruitful trip.

Conclusion

There are still other significant Annual Conference ministries that I have not shared with you today. Do allow the other representatives to do so. I hope that all of us can continue to give our undivided attention to listen to, care for, and participate in these ministries. Last but not least, with the help of the Holy Spirit and by the Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, I would like to call upon all pastors and delegates to humble ourselves and work together in harmony to build a Church that is after God’s own heart.

In Christ,



Bishop Albert Wong