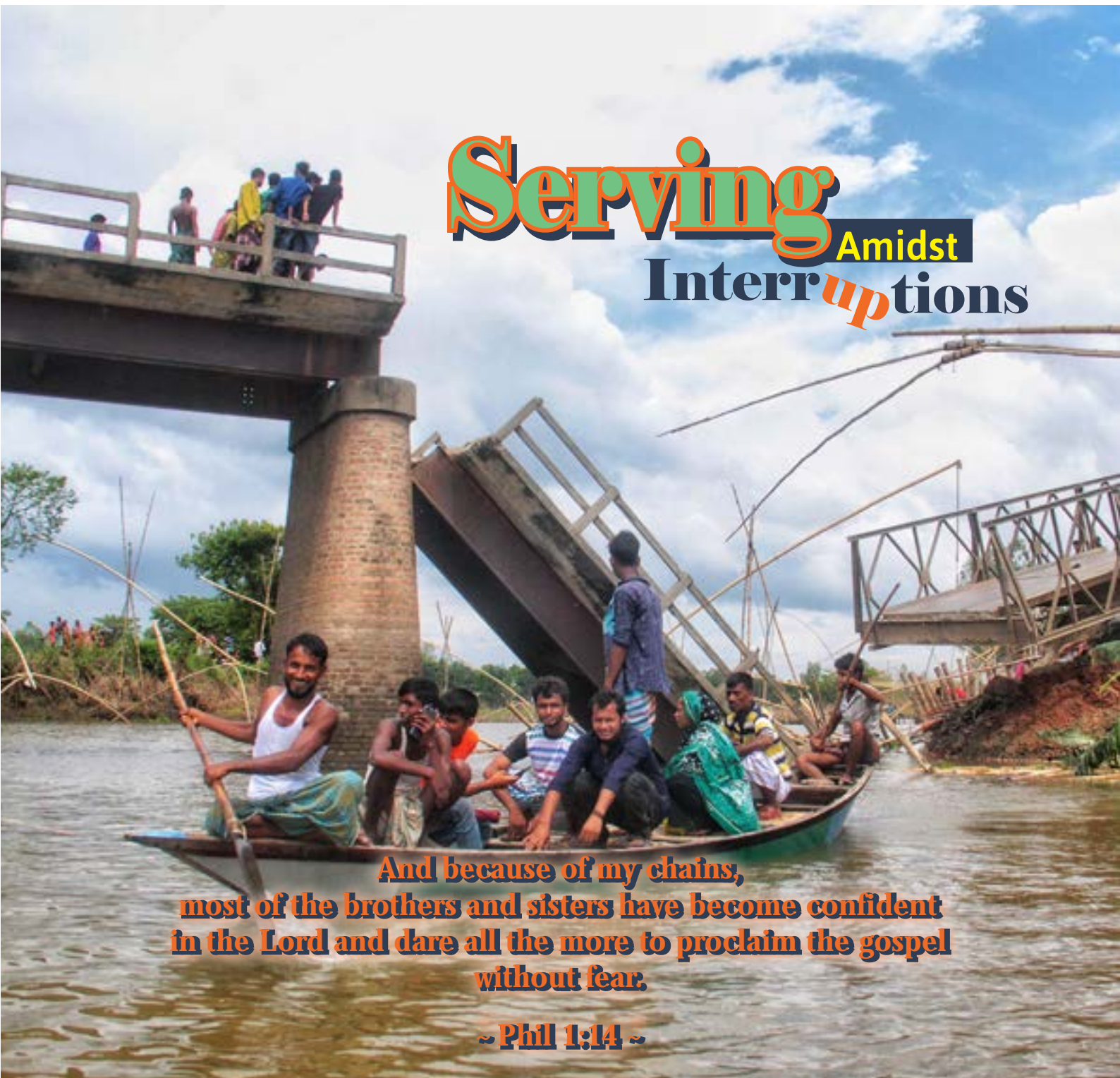


SIM now

East Asia Edition

Serving Amidst Interruptions



**And because of my chains,
most of the brothers and sisters have become confident
in the Lord and dare all the more to proclaim the gospel
without fear.**

~ Phil 1:14 ~



Serving Amidst Interruptions

Watson Rajaratnam - Regional Director, SIM East Asia

Mission is leading people from the Kingdom of Darkness to the Kingdom of Light. Therefore, we need to be always prepared for spiritual warfare with the forces that try deter our progress in mission. Did not Apostle Paul say, **“For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms”**? (Ephesians 6:12). The key question we are trying to grapple with here is, “Are interruptions in mission always perceived as serious interferences of the devil to impede God’s work, or could they also be God’s interventions to fulfil His purposes through creative ways?” As our God is omnipotent and nothing happens without His knowledge, He will continue to fulfil His purposes amidst interruptions.

Indispensability of Interruptions

Apostle Paul, in his Epistle to the Philippians, reminded them of the importance of interruptions from God’s perspective. He knew that even as his ministry was interrupted by imprisonment, the Philippians also endured interruptions through various forms of trials. But he says that amidst those trials **“...He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus”** (Philippians 1:6). The good work in them was the work of character transformation. Surely, during the current interruptions due to the pandemic, God is working more in us than through us as He is more interested in our **“being”** than our **“doing”**. Is God calling us to introspect and set right things which are not right in us during these difficult times?

Interruptions and Interventions

Paul points out that interruptions need not always be bad because they may have positive outcomes too. He says, **“... because of my chains, most of the brothers and sisters have become confident in the Lord and dare all the more to proclaim the gospel without fear”** (Philippians 1:14). We are reminded here, of Acts 1:8, when the disciples who were told to be witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and to the ends of the earth stayed too long in Jerusalem. It was not until persecution came that the disciples were scattered and preached the Gospel everywhere (Acts 11:19). Persecution became a **“divine intervention”** to fulfill God’s plan. Is the current pandemic an intervention of God to move us to be where He wants us to be?

Intervention and Innovation

We wonder how Paul would have preached the Gospel to his fellow prisoners. He says, **“As a result, it has become clear throughout the whole palace guard and to everyone else that I am in chains for Christ”** (Philippians 1:13). This reminds us of how Paul preached the Gospel creatively in the city of Athens. He said, **“For as I walked around and looked carefully at your objects of worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: to an unknown god. So, you are ignorant of the very thing you worship — and this is what I am going to proclaim to you”** (Acts 17:22-23). Is our Lord calling us to do His work in more innovative ways, different from how we have been doing all these years?

“Our God is omnipotent and nothing happens without His knowledge, He will continue to fulfil His purposes amidst interruptions.”

Missionary to Venezuela, T J Bach, once said, **“If we are going to wait until every possible hindrance has been removed before we do a work for the Lord, we will never attempt to do anything.”** Thus, let us be prepared to be

transformed more into the image of Christ even as we continue to serve wherever He has placed us through more creative ways, amidst increasing interruptions.

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E-copy of magazine can be found in website and FB

Compelled to Continue despite Challenges

by Acquila & Priscilla*

My wife and I work in a rural hospital in one of the poorest countries in the world. In the early months of the COVID-19 pandemic, the locals were filled with fear as they saw how other countries struggled to contain it. It reminded them of the deadly Ebola outbreak in December 2014, of overwhelmed intensive care units (ICU), of people wearing personal protection equipment (PPE) and images of mass graves. As a hospital we tried to prepare for it, but we were limited in resources. We found ways to make our own masks and disinfectants. Older missionaries and missionaries with health risks were given a choice to leave the country in repatriation flights. As the airport was closed, and with no ICU and ventilators, we were acutely aware that there may not be any air evacuation if we develop respiratory complications.

Places of worship including churches and mosques were mandated to stop meetings. In a community-oriented environment, with limited phone and Internet connections, social restrictions were difficult to enforce. The missionaries helped the surrounding churches to set up hand washing stations, provided masks, and encouraged social distancing, wearing of masks during meetings and no shaking of hands.

In December 2020, our community succumbed to COVID-19. As the only surgical hospital in the region serving a population of 2 million, we were overwhelmed with patients. With overcrowding and without sufficient COVID testing and contact tracing, hospital workers, including my wife and I, were infected with COVID-19. To control the spread among hospital and healthcare workers, we temporarily reduced hospital services to a minimum. This was a difficult decision, as it meant that many patients would not be able to receive medical care – in a place where more patients die from lack of medical care than from COVID-19.

COVID-19 has indeed affected us and the ministry here. It has reminded us that God alone is sovereign and in control of all things.

Due to security concerns, which restrict us from venturing outside the compound especially after sundown, the times of isolation and quarantine became times of personal reflection of our calling. As a hospital ministry, the medical team was 'forced' to take a break from the usual busyness and enabled us to discuss plans for the future. For non-medical missionaries serving among the nomadic people, it meant no visitations and spending more one-to-one time praying and mentoring local co-workers.

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As the churches continued to meet for Sunday services, weddings, and funerals, we faced a dilemma. Worship involves loud and long singing and praying. While we want to identify with the locals, the risk of COVID infection is increased. Each of us will need to count the cost and decide accordingly. Personally, and for other missionaries who recovered from COVID-19, there was a sense of relief; grateful that we can now attend church and community activities without putting the hospital staff and other missionaries at risk.



Despite our best efforts, what we did was like a drop in the ocean. We served under the constraints of how the government and community were willing to contain the pandemic. In retrospect, the past year was an unexpected interruption, a pause, a test - for us to recharge, to affirm our dependence and trust in God. The spiritual battle is not yet over, Christ's command to make disciples compels us to continue despite the window of opportunity narrowing.

Enhancing our Effectiveness in the New Normal

Rev Peter Teo, Missions Pastor, Mt Carmel Bible-Presbyterian Church

The government announced the "Circuit Breaker" in Singapore on 7 April 2020. That announcement ushered in the "New Normal" in which the traditional, routine, and familiar ways of doing things would be changed. Needless to say, many still yearn that things would be restored once the pandemic is over.

The situation we face now is not new as the Jewish Christians faced something similar in the first Century too. Although the issue at hand was not related to virus but to their faith, the lessons are applicable to us in the 21st Century. The Epistle to the Hebrews was written to Jewish Christians who were tempted to revert to Judaism due to intense suffering (Heb 10:32-34). The author of Hebrews wrote to argue that faith in Jesus Christ is better or superior to the Judaic beliefs. He used the words "better or superior" 15 times to demonstrate that Christ has supremacy and sufficiency over the Judaic system. The following references help us to discover how Christ is better or superior to Judaism: Hebrews 1:4, 6:9, 7:7, 7:22, 8:6, 9:23, 10:34, 11:4, 11:16, 11:35, 11:40 & 12:24.

Hebrews teaches that Jesus is better than Angels, Moses, Aaronic priesthood, Law and its Sacrificial Systems. It also teaches that Jesus offers a better Name, Hope, Covenant, Mediator, Promise, Possession, Country, Resurrection and Blood. Being rational, the preference for things better or superior should lead them to choose a better system, compelling them to press on with the new belief system and not to revert to Judaism.

The lessons from Hebrews are very relevant to our current pandemic situation. The pandemic acts like a disruptor that is forcing the church to evaluate whether our traditional, and familiar ways of doing things are still effective. Our evaluation should lead us to consider what to let go, what to retain, what to change and what new ideas to embrace.

The next set of criteria for evaluation are whether the new ideas have the following capabilities and capacities?

- (1) Can the tools accelerate in reaching people instantly and simultaneously rather than at a slower and intermittent rate?
- (2) Can it reach large masses of people spread over a wide region rather than to a limited number in a sanctuary?
- (3) Can it reach people who live further and deeper and are not easily accessible due to challenging geographical terrains?

(4) Can it cross borders seamlessly without any authority blocking it from entering their countries?

(5) Can it be available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, rather than to wake up at odd hours to receive the information?

(6) Can it go and meet people where they are at their greatest times of need?

(7) Can the tools be easily purchased at affordable prices?



The one answer to these questions is "Yes" and it is found in technology and digital platforms. With the aid of modern telecommunication equipment like radio, television, satellite dish, internet, computer, handphone, video and audio recorder, the church can communicate the Gospel effectively and efficiently.

"Faith in Jesus Christ is better or superior to the Judaic beliefs."

Let me give an example from my own experience as a Missions pastor serving in Mt Carmel Bible-Presbyterian Church. For the last few years, I have been travelling to our daughter churches in Kalimantan with fellow Carmelites, for equipping and teaching. Each 1-week trip costs at least \$3,000, depending on the number of trippers. When I returned the following year, no one could recall what I had taught the previous year. The reasons were obvious – the teaching sessions were short and rushed leaving the trainees no time to reflect, absorb and live out the biblical principles.

Amazingly, COVID-19 forced me to put aside the traditional method of training and pushed me to adopt the technological method of instruction. Last year, I was scheduled to go with my co-worker to Kalimantan. However, due to the pandemic, the trip was cancelled. As the saying goes, nothing like an invisible virus should stop a church from fulfilling its mission. As I was scheduled to teach "Discovering God's Purpose for Your Life", I switched to technology and digital platforms to conduct the same course. Since then, I have been teaching the leaders of

two sister churches over the last 7 months, If we compare the effectiveness of the traditional versus technological method of teaching, we can easily find the following superiority in modern method.

From the table below, the use of technology and digital platforms can be seen to be better for teaching than the traditional method. While the pandemic may last for another 4-5 years until the world's population is vaccinated, it may be wiser to adopt what is better and more effective for spreading the Gospel in the "New Normal".

"Adopt what is better and more effective for spreading the Gospel in the "New Normal"."

#	Category	Traditional Method @ Pre-COVID-19	Technological Method @ During COVID-19
1	Cost	Expensive	Cheap
2	Need for traveling	Both trainer and trainees need to travel long distance	Minimal traveling
3	Duration of training	2 - 3 Days	2 hours per week for 7 months
4	Time of training	Fixed	Flexible
5	Number of trainees	Few	More
6	Ability of trainees to retain lessons	Forget easily as trainer does not repeat or review lessons	Remember readily as trainer repeats and reviews regularly

Surrendering Control to God

by Ruth, Missionary, Thailand

My game plan was to fly to Singapore from Thailand for a debrief in SIM office. With Singapore's close proximity to Malaysia, I naturally made arrangement for visitations to relatives and churches to reconnect. After a month, I thought I would fly to Australia for a vacation with a close friend. Thereafter, I planned to fly to US to fulfil both home assignment and speaking engagements in various churches, and catching up with friends and family. That was the summary of my planned itinerary. To full-proof it, I also had Plan B, C and D as well. In the worst-case scenario, I would return to Thailand and continue my home assignment at a later date.

Despite all my plans, even my worst-case scenario could not be executed. COVID-19 brought all normalcy to a screeching halt. I was trapped in Malaysia.

I prayed daily that I would at least be able to return to Thailand, but that did not happen. What did we do when what we thought was God's plan for our lives fell apart? For me it brought about so many questions, deep questions, that I did not know my heart harbored. I questioned my ministry, my purpose. And while I never questioned the goodness and power of God, I questioned His care for me.

After being trapped in Malaysia for 6 months, an opportunity arose to work in Niger. It was a crucial time as they were struggling to deal with the COVID-19 pandemic as well as the devastating flood.

For three months, I supported the SIM Niger team to the best of my ability teaching in the mission school and doing flood relief work.

From there, God miraculously opened a door. My brother and I were able to arrange a surprise visit to our parents for Christmas celebration in the US. This reunion was much needed after a difficult year for everyone.

A few weeks later, I learnt of a way that would allow me to return to Thailand. However, each step that I took seemed to end in a blind corner. I therefore had to keep walking in faith, not knowing what the next turn would bring.

These past 11 months have brought me to a place where I have no choice but to surrender all control, and every aspect of my life to Jesus. I used to think I had control in and of my life, at least to some extent. That illusion has been shattered. Slowly, as my fragile heart and mental state would allow, I have begun to seek purpose in exactly where God puts me. God is teaching me to live in the here and now, without giving up hope for a better future.

I am still on the road of recovery and learning as I go. But, I am confident that none of these have taken God by surprise and that He has a purpose for it in my life and yours. He is still the same God, who called us to walk in His footsteps. And He invites us to continue walking with Him around the next bend in the road.

"What do we do when what we think is God's plan for our lives falls apart?"



This picture depicts what much of this year has felt like for me. I am thankful that God is the one in control and the One that is responsible for the heavy load. (Taken in the busy streets of Niamey, Niger).

God Intervenes Amidst COVID by Nikali, Missionary, Philippines

When the pandemic hit the Philippines and extensive lockdowns were announced, our foremost question was "What will happen to the ministry?" As I grappled with confused emotions, God intervened in a powerful way. I was amazed by how God pulled all things together perfectly and enabled our lives and ministry to move forward in manners beyond our comprehension.

**"When God empowers,
no resource is too small
for His use."**

But God sent different organizations, churches, groups, and individuals to provide our communities with weekly essential relief like food and hygiene kits.

We thought sharing the gospel with the community amid COVID-19 would not be possible. But God gave us opportunities to witness and share His love as we handed out relief to those who gathered in small groups outside our apartment. Amidst the curfew and restrictions, we were able to engage them at a more personal level by hearing their stories and sharing the message of hope.

Spiritual hunger of the women disciples spurred them to meet weekly for bible study at our apartment, despite the lockdown. To aid the

couple discipling these women God provided a car to travel and meet many physically. The Lord enabled us to run discipleship sessions for kids every fortnight, too.

Through the provision of laptops and stable WIFI, we were able to advance our outreach to the urban poor communities. Leveraging on technology, we were able to have fellowship and spiritual conversations with the weavers. Consequently, we were able to continue with our ministries while staying engaged with the community and team members. This helped the team members to bond and build closer relationships through weekly prayer meetings and training sessions.

One major lesson we learned is to use every resource available within our reach wisely and innovatively, including gadgets, scholarships, Internet, reliefs, crafts, car, printer, house space etc. When God empowers, no resource is too small for His use. We also learned the value of reaching one person at a time. As much as we have been investing time and efforts in groups, investing in one-to-one interface is crucial. Above all, being rooted and fully dependent on the Lord allows God to work powerfully and supernaturally through us individually and collectively as a team.



Do Interruptions Mean the End of Service or Ministry?

by Khrieko & Nitho, Missionaries, Thailand

During these challenging COVID-19 pandemic times, we have experienced God's wonderful hand upon our ministry here in Thailand. Even though most of the outreach programs have been cancelled, God has moved the churches to go into the communities to meet the needs of the people who have been adversely affected. This has resulted in building relationships.

On one occasion, we had to cancel a baptism service. But later when we managed to reorganize the baptism service, we had two candidates for baptism as another person had come to know the Lord.

Although the church building was closed, many were still able to worship the Lord together through online services. However, not everyone in the rural areas have phones or the Internet facilities. We had to find other ways to encourage the believers. God opened doors for people who live close by to gather to worship Him, study the scripture, and pray together in groups of 2 or 3. What a joy to see new believers showing more desire to study God's Word and to pray!



We also heard testimonies of how God brought reconciliation among church leaders and enabled them to start monthly prayer fellowships in new places. In Chaiya-phum province, church leaders are praying together every night through online apps.

**"Praise be to our
God of Mission!"**

We praise God for not only His peace, joy, and blessed hope amidst the pandemic but also for providing creative opportunities to serve Him. Praise be our God of Mission!



With Thanks from former Regional Director ~ Stanley Ling ~

Dear friends and supporters of SIM,

With thanksgiving and rejoicing, I stepped down from the SIM East Asia (SIMEA) Regional Director ministry effective 1 April 2021. My successor is brother Watson Rajaratnam whom I introduced in the last issue of SIMNOW.

How time flies. It's been fifteen and a half years since I took on the Regional Director position of SIMEA. Having neither mission experience in the field, nor full time ministry in a church, I took on the challenge with trembling and caution. But, praise be to God and with your faithful support, we have witnessed exciting things that God has done through SIM in this part of the world.

I want to thank all supporting churches and individuals who stood with us in the last 15 over years, especially in the last one year which was most challenging and trying because of the pandemic. I wish to mention in particular, my sending church, Ang Mo Kio Chinese Methodist Church for singlehandedly supporting me financially and in prayers for the last 15 years. I am grateful to the big family of SIM globally. They accepted me, encouraged me, tolerated me and enriched my experience in serving God full time.

From the bottom of my heart, I want to say how much I appreciate the partnership and contribution of my 30+ co-workers in SIMEA office and some 20 co-workers who are scattered in the 10 countries under SIMEA. The 100 over Council members, Committee members in the region who contributed significantly to the successful growth of SIMEA must not be forgotten. Last but not least, my wife and 3 children who supported me and prayed for me.

To the missionaries who have been sent out from SIMEA office: you are most precious to us. We exist to serve you. You are taking on the challenging job of proclaiming the Gospel in the most difficult places. I am proud of you and pray that you will continue to preach the good news in season and out of season. Thank you for your trust in us!

Paul in his final charge to the Timothy (2 Tim 4:1-8) highlighted 3 things that will ensure the young leader finishes well:

1) Ensure you keep your faith in Christ (v3, 4 & 7)

Faithfulness to the Master must precede faithfulness to the task! God is more concerned about our relationship with Him, our being in Him rather than what we do for him. It is my prayer that I will continue to be faithful to God till the end.

2) Discharge all the duties of your ministry with carefulness and endurance (v5)

The success of a Christian ministry is not defined by the same standard of the world. Nevertheless, this does not mean that we loiter around, put in no effort to what we are doing. Hence, in verse 5, Paul exhorts Timothy to **“keep your head in all situations, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, discharge all the duties of your ministry.”** I pray that I will continue to be very careful with my ministry, endure hardship and work hard discharging all my duties in my ministry.

3) Sacrifice the best to God (v6)

Only God knows how much effort one has put into the ministry. But in verse 6 Paul says **“For I am already being poured out like a drink offering”**. He is telling us to sacrifice everything to the Lord and King! A drink offering cannot be just offered partially, it must be completely poured out. May God help me to pour myself out for His honour and glory.

I hope the short Bible study above will encourage you to do likewise.

May God bless you and prosper you all richly!

Note: Brother Stanley will be on sabbatical leave for 6 months from April to Sept 2021, before returning to SIM as advisor and to serve in mobilising missionaries out of Asia.



Watson presenting souvenir to Dr Stanley Ling at SIMEA 40th Anniversary

Induction and Thanksgiving Service

by Angela, SIM East Asia



Thank
You

In the presence of supporters and leaders from churches, agencies, and SIM, Bishop Gordon Wong of the Methodist Church in Singapore officiated the Induction of Watson Rajaratnam as Regional Director of SIM East Asia on 27 March 2021. Drawing on Philippians 1, he urged everyone to continue "Advancing the Gospel" while "Abounding in Love".

The calls to "**Advance the Gospel**" and to "**Abound in Love**" are intertwined, with Love as the necessary catalyst for organic growth and reaching the least reached with the Gospel. These aptly reflect the DNA of SIM and resonates with SIM East Asia's theme verse for 2021,

"And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless for the day of Christ". (Philippians 1:9-10)

Discerning what is best in the new normal would be key in charting the future course of SIM East Asia.

SIM East Asia continues to strive towards mobilising and sending out more missionaries to places where people are living and dying without Christ. Growing in Christlikeness, developing our capabilities in Discipleship, strengthening our relationship with churches with emphasis on growing Mobilisation, are key areas of focus for Watson. These will help create agility and sustainability in how SIM East Asia will continue the Mission of God in this ever-changing and unprecedented times.

After 15 and a half years, Dr Stanley Ling passed the baton on to Watson. While thanking God, Dr Stanley Ling reiterated that missionaries were precious and always his source of pride. Through the mercies of God, despite all odds, he was able to witness the growth in number of missionaries sent out from East Asia. He confessed that he was humbled and honoured to be given the opportunity to return after his sabbatical leave, to be involved in serving as advisor and mobilising missionaries out of Asia.

As pointed by Bishop Gordon Wong, borrowing from the phrase from Apostle Paul in Phil 1:5, we are thankful for the "partnership in the gospel" with churches, individuals and agencies which has made sending missionaries to the field possible. Glory to God!



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