

Nehemiah 4:6: So we rebuilt the wall till all of it reached half its height, for the people worked with all their heart.



Vision: CCBC, Toward Healthy Growing Disciple-Making Church

2015 Theme: Building and Bringing

February 2015

Looking Back and Moving Forward – Reflecting on God’s Faithfulness and Grace in CCBC’s Journey

A reflective account by Rev (Dr) Gary Choong

TODAY, as we celebrate Covenant Community Baptist Church’s 20th Anniversary, we celebrate God’s FAITHFULNESS to this community of faith. CCBC was officially constituted in 1995 after having been the English congregation of The Singapore Baptist Church (TSBC) for 11 years from 1982-3. It began with a group of brothers and sisters who envisioned an English language worship service to complement the predominantly bilingual (Chinese and English) worship service at TSBC. So, if one traces the origins, one can say that CCBC is actually Thirty-One today! During the very formative seven years, two well-respected missionaries were consulted in the development of the English congregation: Dr. E. N. Poulson and followed by Dr. Sid Schmidt, Baptist Theological Seminary.

It is with a grateful heart to GOD for His faithfulness to CCBC that I began the pastoral ministry in July 1990. Co-leading with leaders of the two congregations to mutually agree to “release” the English congregation (EC) toward autonomy in 1993-4 was an act of God’s grace and mercy. I recalled the 2-year bi-monthly discussions between pastors and leaders of both congregations that conclusively led to the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU). They were testimonies of humility, forbearance by leaders of both congregations, and realignment to fulfilling the Great Commission via the respective language preferences and proficiencies.

The major agreement in the MOU was that the EC would relinquish the “right” to have any say to any matter, development, and property at 1, Cambridge Road of TSBC. By the grace of God, CCBC was

provided access and usage to the fourth floor of the educational block as ministry space and office, and the sanctuary for worship at 8.30am on Sunday morning, as before. These mutual agreements paved the way for CCBC to co-exist in the same premise as a “daughter” church to the mother-church. These were acts of God’s grace and mercy in His expression of faithfulness to CCBC even till this day. I resigned from CCBC in June 1996 to pursue further theological education.

Between Jul 1996 and Dec 2007, God provided CCBC with two full-time pastors, one interim pastor, one youth pastor, and a full-time theologically-trained church administrator: Richard Ong (1996-2002), and Timothy Lim (2004-2007) while David Lim filled the interim gap. Michael Ting served among the youths, late 2007-2011. Sharon Taw served as church administrator, mid 2006-2011. We are thankful for each of their service and contribution to CCBC’s life stage development during these continuing formative years. CCBC experienced God’s continued faithfulness in a rapid changing church demographics and transitions in a most profound way.

At the invitation of CCBC, I returned to serve as Advisory Pastor, April 2008 through Dec 2012, and subsequently accepting their call to be Senior Pastor, Jan 2013 till the present. For a few significant reasons 2008 through 2012 was a very challenging phase to me and to CCBC’s development as well.

First, within me, I struggled. Did I say “yes” because I was 100% convinced of God’s hand upon this call, or did I say “yes” because of past relationships and

that I was one of the “founding” members of CCBC in 1994, and coupled with the dire spiritual state and needs as I’d observed? Second, pastoring a church was the farthest thing on my mind when we returned in late 2007. My first priority was to write and complete my Ph.D. dissertation, when I accepted a part-time teaching appointment at the Baptist Theological Seminary. Third, I was mentally, physically and emotionally stressed over my father’s ill health which needed constant attention. Fourth, perhaps the hardest of all, the re-entry stress of returning back to Singapore experienced by my wife and I was a very difficult one, especially for me. We did not have a permanent home upon our return; the stressors of family needs, teaching and pastoring concurrently, and most demanding of all, dissertation research and writing. Three to four days a week, for about 18 months, I had to travel to a few libraries to work on my dissertation, and taking public transportation to these faraway places under the sweltering heat were very distressing and discouraging!

For CCBC, 2008-2012 was also a period of unrelenting change and awkward transition with difficult issues to be resolved. The worship attendance started to dwindle when I took over the helm. Those were stressful days for the leadership and myself as I endeavoured to provide spiritual and leadership renewal via preaching, teaching, equipping lay leaders to preach, shared-leading, pastoring, crafting shared core-values, and realigning a Shared Mission-Vision Strategy toward fulfilling the Great Commission. To add to the stresses of pastoral and church ministry we had also to deal with a few disciplinary matters, and the uncertainty of the use of the premises on 1 Cambridge Road. In fact, the thought of closing shop became an option in the midst of great distress and discouragement. We also considered a potential merger with another church which did not work out. We had some guests who visited, stayed with us for brief periods, but subsequently left. To say the least, these were very disconcerting days for me, and I am sure it was the same for the leaders and the church as well, if not worse. Everywhere we turned, it seemed we were out of favour with God. Nothing seemed to work.

However, GOD intervened in 2012 and somehow the Lord orchestrated: first, the leadership, and then the church, to rise up toward a disciple-making church. What was communicated, challenged, and

envisioned since 2008 did not fall on deaf ears after all. As a matter of fact, the disciple-making paradigm was first trumpeted as far back as the early 1990s based on the small group model when I was pastor. It took off steadily as envisioned, maintained along for some periods, but totally lost traction as the church failed to stay on course through surging circumstances, leadership transitions, and changing demographics from early 2000 to 2007.

Toward the close of 2012, God turned us around. I was very encouraged when the leadership saw what was perceived as God’s doing at CCBC, and was unanimously “sold” to the idea that the core-purpose or business of the church was discipleship and disciple-making according to the Great Commission (Matt. 28:19-20). I casted the Shared Disciple-Making Mission-Vision in Jan 2013 at our first worship service of the year, had our watershed prayer meeting that garnered the hearts of all to gain ownership and followed by June retreat where the Disciple Groups (DG) were allotted and in September 2013 began our disciple-making journey by the grace of God! Together as a Core Team, we’d met for months since Feb 2013 to discuss, consult, and finally garnered the people together **“Toward a healthy, growing disciple-making church”**. We celebrated our first DG Day in October 2014 to mark the First-Year of our disciple-making journey. Praise the Lord! The many good reports that we’ve heard and shared over the pulpit, testimonies in the newsletters, and personal conversations are demonstrations of God’s faithfulness to give CCBC a new lease in life! We’d started well by the grace of God, and continuing into 2015 we seek God to grow the church in and through discipleship and disciple-making.

Looking back, all of us can be grateful to God for His faithfulness and grace to CCBC. The first formative 12 years as the English congregation of TSBC, God prospered the congregation in vibrancy and numbers. God enabled the constitution of CCBC in 1995 through mutual dialogue and harmonious partnership with the mother church. God provided the fourth level in the education building as office and ministry space, and use of the sanctuary for worship. The second formative 12 years, under two different seasons of full-time pastoral leadership (July 1996-2002; 2004-07), augmented by an interim pastor, a youth pastor, and a church administrator, we also see God’s faithfulness to CCBC in allowing her to withstand pastoral leadership transitions in

the midst of changing demographics and demanding circumstances—to learn that God is still faithful to CCBC even in difficult times.

The third formative phase, 2008-2012, was a tumultuous period of transforming change and awkward transition. This 4-year period may be considered the most trying, a period of testing to find God and His purpose for the church. It is like we were put through a crucible of tests, trials, and tears. In our earnest and sincere quest, God found us, God broke us: **In God's faithfulness—His grace turned the church around from one of dying toward one of disciple-making.** At the brink of despair and hopelessness, God gave new hope to CCBC toward fulfilling His Great Commission Vision. For this we are thankful—Thankful for His grace and mercy.

Looking back, 2013 may historically be considered the “real” beginning of Covenant Community Baptist Church. If one calculates back to when the church had actually begun, it had taken the church 30 years to reach this point in time—to rediscover herself for God. If one takes 1995 as the beginning of CCBC, it has taken us 18 years to find our true identity as a church, and redefine for ourselves what the purpose of the church is on earth. Whichever date you take, it's a very small beginning like that of a “mustard seed.” We thank God for this small beginning of our journey of faith. Our disciple-making journey is short as we incepted in September 2013. We are barely two in this journey of faith—if you may, we are merely like toddlers. There is still a long way for us to travel together on this journey of disciple-making.

Today, 20 years (for some, 31 years) of history have come and gone. Several of you have lived through these past 20 years; some 10 years or more or perhaps less; others less than five. You've been through the thick and thin, the happy and the sad, the good and the bad. When and how many years you have been with CCBC don't quite matter. What matters most is that you and I, and all of us here today, celebrating CCBC's 20th Anniversary (2015), desire to journey together to re-write a new chapter for Covenant Community Baptist Church—to first, become disciples of Christ, and then, to make disciples of others—to fulfill the Great Commission vision given us by the Lord Jesus Christ in Matthew 28:19-20! May those who will live through the next twenty years (2035) of Covenant Community Baptist

Church's history be able to look back at this day and say as we are now saying: Thanks be to God! *“to him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.”* (Eph 3:21).

A Day at Kids Amaze

By Joy Yew

It was a fun and eventful day as I joined the FCSC children at 'Kids Amaze', an indoor playground. They were very energetic and boy did I have a good workout as I followed them through the “tunnels and mazes” in the playground. Even “quiet” children “came alive” in the playground! It was a good learning moment when Tom came up to tell me that John and himself had found some coins and they were going to return it to the counter staff. I was impressed by Tom's honesty and praised him. I felt that he had set a very good example to John, who was his junior. *(Names has been changed)*



Later on, Tom lost his book and was very upset as he was afraid of getting scolded by his mum. One of the staff was very helpful and volunteered to help him find the book. Announcements were made but to no avail. Later, we went to approach the staff of the other student care centre and they too tried to help us find the missing book. Finally, the book was found. Another boy had taken it. I went up to speak with him, and after explaining that his actions were wrong, he apologized to Tom. I thought that it was a very valuable lesson for Tom, as he could witness someone not being afraid to admit his wrongs. He would also learn to take proper care of his belongings in future.

The children displayed teamwork and camaraderie as they played, and watched out for one another. I was impressed that they could even learn to wait for “aunty” who was much slower than them at the playground. This outing left me with bruises, but the joy and sweet aftertaste far outweighed the little discomforts. I do look forward to playing and interacting with this group of bubbly children again.

Kidz Klub Christmas Camp - Dec 2014

By Cheong Mee Ling

Chee Meng and I have been conducting Character First! sessions fortnightly at FCSC since Feb 2014. As a concerted follow-up outreach effort, the idea of a 3-day (22 -24 Dec 2014) Kidz Klub Christmas camp was conceived as part of CCBC Christmas outreach program.

We set out with the objective that the kids learn about the true significance of Christmas - the birth of Jesus Christ, who Jesus is and His mission; and learn and apply one attribute/character (humility) of Jesus through stories, songs, art and craft.



We thank God for answered prayers for full attendance by all 16 children from FCSC, plus 1 special K2 guest, who is Margaret's grand-niece. In spite of 5 non-Chinese children, we thank God that hearts and minds were open and receptive. He enabled us to share the planned messages, and the children thoroughly enjoyed the children's worship songs.

Joy taught the children a Christian praise song in sign language as well as simple Christmas tunes on the piano. They were eager, proud and enthusiastic to share what they learned and presented them at the Christmas Eve celebration.

We are very grateful for the many who volunteered, especially with the clay modelling session led by Richard, and the other activities and outing to the Children's Garden at the Gardens by the Bay.

I must admit that this Christmas had been most, trying to manage the hyper-active children. Nevertheless, being able to get to know them better and to share God's message with them were most rewarding. More challenging times will come when we launch the Kidz Klub sometime in 2015. Please pray for God's favour and enablement.



Christmas Celebration on 24th Dec 2014

By Adelynn Lee

The Christmas celebration was one of the major bridge-building events for CCBC to BRING our pre-believing friends and relatives to share with them the true meaning of Christmas—that Christ came to offer hope and forgiveness to mankind.

The planning committee considered a few themes and eventually decided on "The Gift" with John 3:16 as the focus. "The Gift" carries the message that Christmas is more than just exchanging presents and merrymaking. It is indeed *"our God who loves us so much that He sends His only Son that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life."*

Amongst other things, we are thankful to God for answered prayers—the unexpectedly good turnout of pre-believers. One hundred and four showed up, ranging from toddlers to those in the 70s. Together, we rejoiced and celebrated the birth of Jesus Christ, and watched performances by the kids from FCSC and CCBC—more than half are pre-believers. It is my prayer that CCBC, church, and individuals will desire to engage the guests who came as part of our church outreach to this community.

