

When I first embarked on my research on *Leadership Succession in Small and Medium Sized Baptist Churches in Singapore* in 2011, CCBC was one of the eight churches I visited in April 2011. CCBC was chosen as my on-site project because I wanted to explore how leaders were identified, groomed, and empowered for ministry; and promising young candidates mentored for leadership and future pastoral positions. This task required me to stay for a year in order to present a credible analysis will now stretch to four years. This is a story of an outsider to an insider.¹

I started my project in April 2012 by interviewing the church leaders whose ages ranged from the 20s to the 50s. I was impressed by the respect and unity these inter-generational leaders had for one another; a cohesive, collaborative, inclusive, and a “we-centric” environment that had been fostered over the years. However, my hope and excitement for CCBC plummeted in the later months when I heard that several leaders would be stepping down; a pessimistic member painted a grim possibility of CCBC’s closure, another member wondered why Pr. Gary would “stay on a sinking ship”. The spiritual climate of the church was one of stagnation, lethargy, skepticism, and heaviness; I could sense that some brothers and sisters were really downcast. Frankly, I was puzzled, and even being an outsider I was extremely concerned for the spiritual climate of the church, and prayed for God’s grace to turn the ashes into life for His glory.

GOD IS @ WORK: Spiritual markers of God’s movement at CCBC

From the ashes, God is at work in bringing about His goodness and grace in the recent months. From ashes of despondency, God has orchestrated a few people to come together every Wednesday morning to pray for the church. Every member: child, youth, adult, (young, middle and old), and couple are prayed for. Glimpses of the works of God:

- Members who were once like sand that slipped off the fingers’ grasp are coming together to pray instead of leaving church immediately after tea fellowship.
- Some quiet and reserved members are rising up to encourage others, brothers and sisters are more open to share their concerns and ask for prayer support.
- Brothers and sisters who felt like failures responded to the altar call to pray for a breakthrough in their lives.
- Guitar lessons are conducted to equip members to worship the Lord with a musical instrument; some may eventually serve in the worship ministry.
- A few like-minded members formed a community task force, on their own initiative, to explore possibilities of community outreach.
- Pr. Gary has decided to serve full-time with the church, instead of his advisory pastor’s role. CCBC M-V-S: Toward a Healthy Growing Disciple-Making Church (DMC) 2013-2020+ , a dream that was birthed in 2007, is now being actualized into a practical vision and mission; it follows after Jesus’ discipleship model: Come and See, Come and Follow Me, and Come and be with Me.
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- Most CCBC worshippers responded to Pr Gary’s altar call to follow Jesus as a disciple and to participate in the DMC, culminating in brothers and sisters standing at the aisle with him while he signed his letter of appointment on January 6, 2013. I was moved to tears by God’s hand to move many individuals, couples and families to respond to His call.

¹ Since I have finished my project, I was sharing my reflection and the spiritual markers I observed with Pr. Gary after our Wednesday prayer in January 2013. He texted me to consider penning down my thoughts to share with the church. I thought “why not?”, if these spiritual markers could edify the church and glorify God. I pray that it will remind us that God is @ work all the time and we should be thankful that, “GOD IS GOOD ALL THE TIME, AND ALL THE TIME GOD IS GOOD”.

From an Outsider to an Insider

- Twenty one (more than 50% of the adults) adults attended the en-visioning and covenanting retreat on 18 January 2013. They are the early adopters who have covenanted to commit themselves to be involved in this process of disciple making toward spiritual maturity, multiplication, and leadership development.
- Some members are making intentional efforts to update one another and we are seeing more encouragements coming forth to spur brothers and sisters toward spiritual solidarity and growth.
- A DM think tank has been formed to plan and implement a DM 5-level strategy for CCBC.

If you have other glimpses of God@work in our midst, do share it with the church so that we can praise the Lord for pruning and refining our hearts and relationships, and His transformative work in our church to mold us to be more like Jesus. We must not rest on our laurels; this is just the beginning of God clearing the dross in our hearts to draw us into a deeper walk with Him and a renewed relationship with one another. We need to press on to believe that we have a faithful God who will establish the desires of our hearts to put Him first in our lives.

The preaching of the seven churches in the book of Revelation aptly reminds us that churches which were once flourishing can become complacent and lukewarm over time; the light of these seven lamp-stands flickered and were completely snuffed out. The land which was once filled with Christians is now a predominant Muslim land today should jerk us to the reality of God's abomination, judgment, and wrath poured on those churches that chose to disobey and reject His ways.

With the benefit of hindsight gleaned from the above biblical precedent, we now need to move forward with spiritual foresight. Disruptions and destructions are the works of the evil one to divide and conquer; we need God's armour to protect us (Ephesians 6). Pr. Gary and the leadership team need the VVIPs to stand in the gap with them. These VVIPs are the intercessors, the prayer shield that surround the leadership to ward off the fiery darts of the evil one. The leaders, on their part, will continue to be alert to watch and pray.

We pray for God's grace and the touch of God to stoke the sparks into flames of fire that will burn for Jesus and His Kingdom works. We pray that CCBC will be a community revived by the fresh wind of the Holy Spirit; a redemptive community that will forgive, release forgiveness, and seek reconciliation with one another; letting go of past hurts to receive God's healing touch afresh, and making disciples to go to the community and beyond. Certainly, "No more sitting on the fringe, Come, be an INSIDER". I was once an outsider; I'm now an insider for the next two years at least. The chorus of the song, "*If we hold on together*", reminds us:

*If we hold on together, I know our dreams will never die; dreams see us through to forever.
In God we abide; for you and I*

I urge brothers and sisters to pray with one united heart and voice, to hold one another accountable to love God with all our hearts, with all minds, with all our souls and with all our strength. TO GOD BE THE GLORY.

In all things give thanks,
Siew Tiang