

49TH SESSION OF THE TAMIL ANNUAL CONFERENCE
METHODIST CHURCH IN MALAYSIA
SEEK GOD'S GLORY BY BEING SALT AND LIGHT OF THE WORLD

Matthew 5:13-16

PRESIDENT'S ADDRESS

Greetings to all of you in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord and Saviour. I welcome all of you to the 49th session of our TAC and I humbly believe that God will continue to bless all of us if we continue to seek His glory. This year, I am truly grateful to God for the possible birth another new local church, growing us to become 58 churches.

I am also deeply thankful to HIM alone for calling five new young people into full-time ministry, who will be sent for pre-ministerial training in January 2025. Additionally, in January 2025, we will have four new students entering full-time theological studies. I want to testify here that all these have been given graciously unto us by God, who answers to our fervent prayers. Praise be to God alone. Hallelujah.

1. Looking Forward: Based on Our 50-year Journey.
 - a. Next year will be the 50th session of our Tamil Annual Conference. Firstly, we need to be grateful for what God has done. We are thankful because we began small with little or no resources, but with God our side we have prevailed thus far.
 - b. Secondly, we prevailed because we have strived to obey His call to reach out to the Indians, especially the Tamils, which was the foremost heart cry of those who prayed at the beach. This is our God given vision, we cannot abandon this obligation but prioritize and carry this vision and mandate in all our local churches.
 - c. Thirdly, we need to evaluate our approaches to suit the current changes that have come upon us. For instance, since many of our young ones do not carry a Tamil Bible anymore, we should be considering English and Malay services as well. In this respect, The CAC churches have adapted well as most of their urban context churches also have English language worship services.
 - d. Our existing Liturgy and mode of worship needs a serious review. Otherwise, we may be trapped into fulfilling only traditions of men only (Matthew 15:9). In addition, the ability to cater to our young ones who seek some changes in worship through youth services are something that we must begin to consider in all our local churches.

- e. We should not just change anything for the sake of changing but must seek to adapt and embrace based on our posture of discerning and obeying what God wants us to do at this time, in this generation.
- f. All of our local church LCECs need to conduct a serious evaluation of existing ministries before embarking on their planning for next year.
- g. If done diligently, the questionnaire at the end of this address will be able to guide our thinking and articulate our strengths and weaknesses.

2. Our God Given Conference Theme.

- a. To seek God's Glory as individuals or as churches is something that is non-negotiable. We must never try to seek anything else. We need to ask God if there is anything within us or our churches that are not glorifying Him, even in a little way.
- b. Divisions, pride, jealousy and our inability to do what God wants from us as His vessels on earth, are some of the enemies to God's glory. We need to consciously identify and reject them from within us and amongst us.
- c. However, if we seek His Glory, Kingdom and His Righteousness, all else will be added unto us. This includes church growth and revival. It's a fallacy to assume that God will or must grow all local churches. God will never grow a church that is divided or proud because it will only grow the existing division and pride. A serious and humble introspection is needed.
- d. Pastors and leaders need to remember that without God we can do nothing (John 15:5). Without Him we cannot build or grow (Psalm 127:1). While we do make plans and look into far-reaching long-term vision for our Annual Conference, crafting our own clever plans and strategies will not be sufficient. Only when we can humble ourselves God and ask Him what to do will he be able to lift us up and use us for His glory.
- e. Salt and light to the community. Churches need to constantly ask whether the local church is indeed being a Salt and light to the community. When we reach out with the love of God it begins to bring what is within our four walls to outside the church.
- f. Both the pastor and the LCEC must have the burden to reach out, without which we will just be doing activities and programs based on our church calendar. These things may make us to feel contented that we have done something but in turn may not have made God very happy.
- g. Salt and light to the world. I am glad that many churches have been able to be salt and light in different parts of the nation even the world when pressing needs were presented. It speaks much about our ability to empathize with the suffering of others.

- h. The Bible teaches us that we have the power from God to bring change, which is why the early church grew and was able to plant new churches.

3. Our Growth Group Agenda (Discipleship).

- a. This is one of the key core areas where we can consciously shape and develop the discipleship of our members. We cannot assume that by attending weekly services, it is sufficient for our members to grow in their discipleship journey.
- b. Based on our two-years ago roadmap that gave a charted timeline, by now we should be seeing many churches benefitting from this.
- c. For our general understanding, the ‘format’ of a Growth Group meeting is just like cell-group or area fellowship, which is a small group setting. The content is also similar, where we give room for a brief worship and take time discussing and growing in the word of God.
- d. The only things that are considered “extra” in GG, is the setting aside of either a 15mins or 20 minutes session where we enquire each other’s well-being, ask for specific prayer needs and spend time praying for one another. This meets the emotional needs of our members.
- e. This is what actually ‘fills in the blank’ in our local church life, as we cannot do this on a Sunday service setting where our people come and return home quickly. We have also been encouraging GG leaders to visit the members and keep in touch with them throughout the week.
- f. However, only some churches have had localised successes, many need to re-evaluate and consider their current approach. Some of the main feedback received thus far.
 - Local church leaders not excited about it.
 - Local pastor not driving the agenda.
 - Not enough leaders to run the groups.
 - Already have cell-group and area fellowship method in existence.
 - Not sure how the Growth group is different than cell-group and area fellowship.
- g. In the roadmap, we assumed that pastors and leaders would immediately hand down the Growth Group agenda to the local cell group leaders. However, I now realize that we need to meet the local level Growth Group leaders to explain and assist them in their emerging issues. This can be done either regionally or as combined church sessions.
- h. If the existing local cell group leaders can have clear understanding of the important element needed to function as Growth Groups, they will know what to do during their meetings.
- i. We need to pray much for this to be understood and picked up by our leaders as our members are yearning for deeper fellowship and connection.

4. Evangelism and Missions.

- a. Pastors and LCEC members must find ways to rekindle and renew their passion for evangelism among our members. The purpose of Jesus coming to the earth is to seek and save the lost. This is also the God given agenda of every born-again believer.
- b. Evangelism is not just a program, yearly event or a conference requirement, it is an act of love for the lost. We can train people for evangelism but when there is no heart for the lost, it becomes a meaningless and even burdensome requirement.
- c. However, there are many in our local churches who joyfully reach out and intentionally seek to bring those in bondage and darkness into freedom and light. These are the persons that pastors and leaders need to empower and encourage.
- d. These persons may not be in LCEC positions or even have much education or finance able, but these are the ‘gems’ amongst us that are considered great in heaven for they are partnering in our father’s work (Ezekiel 34).
- e. Churches without any outreach work or preaching points need to re-evaluate their priorities. The church exists in order to reach out to the lost, without a focus on evangelism they will only be serving themselves and their own needs. Eventually, it will lead to infighting and power struggles in leadership.
- f. Today, we have mission opportunity at our doorstep. Have our churches capitalized on this? Is our LCEC and our young ones excited about refugee ministry or diaspora ministries. If not, we need to ask, why?
- g. At the Conference level, we recently concluded the Children’s Missions Camp which was able to plant such seeds of our young ones. However, we must find out who will nurture them when they return to their local churches. It could be the Missions Chairperson or their own church school teachers but someone has to make it a conscious agenda.
- h. Churches can also partner with our existing missionaries and the various MMM projects.

5. Lay Leadership.

- a. I wish to appreciate the good ministry and commitment of our LCEC members in our local churches. God is able to use anyone if they are willing to humble themselves, listen to Him and serve Him without any notions of self-interest.
- b. Our LCEC members need to be able to discern God’s voice and seek to obey Him at all times. If we are unable to do so, we will not know or fulfil His will in any given decisions that are made on His behalf during LCEC meetings.

- c. I have often noted that most of the times we speak about leadership and elections, it only happens just before the second local conference. Leadership takes time to develop. Pastors and senior leaders in the church must consciously groom and mentor new leaders who can discern God's voice and do His bidding. They may make mistakes, but that is the point; that they may be able to learn from them, through our loving guidance.
- d. Our LCEC must also be willing to listen to their pastor. Though pastors are not perfect persons, they have been brought to the church by God as His shepherds to give spiritual oversight.
- e. Our Methodist system allows a good partnership between the clergy and the laity. When the pastor and the LCEC is able to work together, it becomes an added strength of the local church.
- f. Our LCEC members need to take time to listen to our members, especially our young people. I urge all our local LCEC to schedule a heart-to-heart session to understand their concerns and potential input. They need to be heard so that they too would feel that their contributions are being valued. Please do this in early 2025.
- g. The Youth Department has come up with a general survey that sought to hear the cries of our young people. While it is good, the survey/feedback done at the local church level will help each LCEC to understand their inner cries.
- h. When we ignore them or don't think that listening to them is not important, they will go to where they will be heard, giftings utilized and feel appreciated.
- i. The LCEC must also be able to listen to the needs of the community. The call to function as salt and light of the earth is primarily a call to reach out where our local church is planted. We cannot be insulated within the confines of our local churches and be satisfied with our programs and activities. We need to reach out as Jesus did as it is the lost among us that need Jesus more.

6. Our Pastors.

- a. All our pastors in our TAC are gifts from God to our churches. He is the one who has called them to serve as pastors. Although they were groomed in their early by their own local churches, the churches that they have been posted to now is their new home, their new family and community. The local church is where they find their worth and work out their calling from God.
- b. As an Annual Conference, we expect all pastors to work hard in their preaching and teaching. They are also expected to visit homes and care for the members at their times of

need. This is their primary calling. The local church LCEC and the PPRC must be able to journey kindly with the pastor if he is struggling in certain areas.

- c. Although some pastors struggle in a local church due their own weaknesses, please be mindful that spiritual attacks on them and their family is also a reality. Every local church must raise prayers warriors who can take turns cover the pastor and his family in their prayers daily. Praying for the pastor will also bring fire to the pulpit. I urge the local church Lay Leader to set up a team of at least seven praying persons who can be rostered on a daily basis.
- d. Some pastors struggle with a sense of burnt out and may need to take scheduled breaks during the year to rest and recuperate. No pastor can keep running and giving without the need to restore and rebuild themselves.
- e. I appeal to pastors to recognize the need to break away from routine ministry and find ways to restore their own spiritual vigour and zeal. Consequently, I also appeal to local churches to allow pastors to attend conferences and refresher courses which in turn brings a direct benefit to the local church.
- f. We are indeed grateful to God for all our student pastors. Those who are being sent for their pre-ministerial training and who are being posted on a one-year practical break will be assigned one senior pastor as their guide and mentor. This is done to assist them in their weekly preaching skills, praying with them and helping them to cope with struggles in ministry.
- g. We must not forget all our Retired Pastors who are our faithful ministers who have served God within the ambit of the Tamil Annual Conference till their retirement day. Please speak with them, encourage them and if needed, invite and use them in your local church.
- h. As a conference, currently we are only able to give them a 'pension' of RM 200 per month which they have appreciated greatly. I thank GMC Kelana Jaya for their generous gift toward the Pension Fund that was received this year.
- i. I am really hoping that in the coming quadrennium, we could increase the 'pension' to RM 250 per month, which comes up to RM 3, 250 per pastor, per year (including the 13th month). This can only happen if some of our larger churches assist us with a generous endowment amount that will help us to generate a FD interest from the endowment which is in turn injected into the pension fund. It will surely be a great blessing to all our beloved seniormost ministers.

- j. Alternatively, if we can have several churches to taking responsibility over two or three pastors over the year (the amount per retired pastor, mentioned earlier), this can become a reality.

7. Our Families.

- a. At this time and age, our families have come under much attack by the evil one who do does wish to see a Christian lineage developing into the future. If we ignore these subtle and sometimes direct attacks, it will too late for us to redeem the situation.
- b. Our God given families are the foundational blocks of our church community. This where children need to brought up in Godly ways. It is sad to see some parents passing on their spiritual call and responsibilities solely into the hands of the church school.
- c. Parents must take time to talk to their children about Jesus and help them to pray on their own. Parents who are not excited about God cannot impart it into the lives of their children.
- d. I would like to see pastors and LCEC leaders making plans and taking efforts to help our parents to mentor our young ones. I would like the Board on Laity to look into possible ways to come alongside local churches on this matter.
- e. We also need to reach out to the many singles within our families in our churches. There could be multiple reasons as to why they are still single. We cannot side-line them or ignore them but find ways of understanding them to journey with them.
- f. The LGBTQ agenda is another snare that our parents must be equipped to deal with. It has already come into schools and media where it is being touted as something natural and acceptable.

8. Our Boards and Organizations.

- a. All the reports from the relevant Boards and Organizations have already been given in detail by the respective Board Chairpersons and Organizations' Presidents.
- b. I sincerely appreciate the good work of each of the Board Chairpersons and their team members who have done well and have worked to fulfil their responsibilities to the best of their abilities.
- c. I also appreciate the respective Organization Presidents both at the District and national levels. They provide an important avenue for a yearly coming together beyond the confines of our local and district churches.
- d. All our organizations have also become a grooming platform to grow new leadership, which in turn becomes a blessing to all our local churches as well.

9. The Methodist Church in Malaysia.

- a. I am grateful to God for the spiritual leadership of our Bishop, Rev Dr T Jeyakumar. I am always amazed at the scope and breadth of his travels and input into the various councils both here as well as Sabah and Sarawak.
- b. He has also been working to the current Methodist Book of Discipline to make it more effective and less ambiguous. The new MBOD is expected to be out in early 2025 as we need to wait until all the Annual Conferences have voted on the proposed legislature.
- c. The Parliament Act 457 Booklet that stipulates our legitimacy to exist and function as a church in this nation is available for RM 1 each.
- d. The pre-marital counselling material, Marriage Manual, has been produced in English. Please use them and keep extra copies handy in our church office.
- e. The Marriage Manual for Couples are RM 8 each.
- f. The Marriage Manual Handbooks for Pastors and Counsellors are RM 36 each.
- g. The Marriage Manual handouts for couples are RM 3 each.
- h. The Methodist Membership Manual is available for RM 10 each. There are limited copies in Malay as well. Please buy them for your confirmands and new believers.
- i. The Methodist Book of Worship is also now available.
- j. The 2025 Methodist Planner / diaries can be collected only by those who have ordered earlier.
- k. To get any of the publications mentioned above, please liaise with Bro. James our office administrator who will assist you on all these purchases.
- l. I plead with all our local churches to set aside yearly budget contribute to our Methodist Education Foundation Scholarship. Please make it a yearly contribution.
- m. The publicity for this is given out in April or May each year. We praise God that many of our TAC students are continuing to benefit from this.
- n. Some of our members have also asked about the nomenclature change from Conference Bishop to Conference Presidents. Bishop Jeya will explain on this matter further as it is related to the recently concluded GCEC session in August.

10. NATIONAL LEVEL CONCERNS.

- a. The recent Mufti Bill and ongoing efforts to legalize the RUU 355 are important developments that our own members need to be aware of.
- b. We cannot think or assume that this has nothing to do with us. I hope that they are being discussed at suitable platforms. We do not need to become anxious or pessimistic but find ways of being able to articulate our appropriate responses.
- c. As I highlighted last year, on the political front, the so called 'Green Wave' is not something that should be taken lightly. We are now gradually finding out that our political leaders whom we thought as being more progressive and open, are also now pandering to the majority group for their own political survival.
- d. When we see Palestine solidarity flags displayed openly and a hatred towards Israel expressed publicly in an unreserved manner, it causes us to wonder where it will eventually lead to. It may not be too far away when the already existing Bumiputera vs non-Bumiputera dilemma evolves into becoming an ummah vs non-ummah issue.
- e. I wish to urge all our Churches to pray for our Prime Minister, the cabinet and other leaders and our nation's well-being in prayer cells and home prayer. Let us continue to pray for peace and religious freedom to continue being the priority of our nation.
- f. As I emphasize in my address every year, may I remind all our churches to take the initiative to engage with their ADUN and MP in their area. We need to visit them, engage with them, and consciously pray for them as well.

11. ACKNOWLEDGEMENT.

- a. I sincerely thank Bishop Dr T Jeyakumar for his friendship, guidance, assistance, and prayer support. I wish to recognize our Bishop's love and support for our conference and local church needs.
- b. My sincere appreciation to all our pastors and workers and their families who work sacrificially in ministry. I always pray for them and their families every day.
- c. I thank all our lay leaders and LCEC members in our local churches who pray and work with wholehearted commitment as they serve God through TAC.
- d. I thank all our Executive Board members and the Finance Board members, for their input and support. I appreciate the unity and the camaraderie during our long meetings.
- e. I also value the input from the Conference Lay Leader and his associates and for their encouragement.

- f. I thank the Conference Secretary, Mr Michael Raja, the Conference Treasurer, Mr Franches and Bro Augustus, our Finance Chairman who work very hard behind the scenes.
- g. I wish to appreciate all our office staff; Bro. James, Sis Mercy, Sis Jenitha and Bro Shakespeare who have always been a great help.
- h. I also record my thanks to Bro. Jesu who always open to assist in any way when needed.
- i. My appreciation goes to the prayer team and all others who take time to pray for me and my family on a regular basis.
- j. Lastly, I wish to appreciate my wife Alice and my three children who have always supported me in ministry.

May GOD bring revival and growth in all to our local churches as we seek the Glory of His name alone in all that we do for Him. All Glory, Praise and Honor unto Jesus Christ our Lord alone.

‘For I will pour water on the thirsty land and streams on dry ground.

I will pour out my spirit on your offspring,

and my blessings on your descendants’.

Isaiah 44:3

Thank You and God Bless You.

By HIS Grace,

Rev Dr Dennis Raj

Tamil Annual Conference,

Methodist Church in Malaysia.

LOCAL CHURCH CHECKLIST FOR LCEC PLANNING SESSIONS

- 1. What are specific areas that our church will focus on for this year?
What will be some of the steps taken to plan, execute and budget for these ministries?**
- 2. What do we need to do to develop existing Growth groups in our own local church? Are all our LCEC leaders willing to lead Growth groups? What else is needed.**
- 3. Are the spiritual needs of the Children in our church met? Has the LCEC seen the material used for teaching them? Do the teachers need anything else?**
- 4. Has the LCEC taken time to listen to the young people? Are there some things that need addressing? Are the Youths given opportunities for ministry in the local church?**
- 5. What are the weaknesses in the Evangelism Ministry of our local church? How is it being addressed? Is the local church praying earnestly for new souls?**
- 6. How does our church ensure that members are being ministered to within their family context? What are the plans to assist parents to disciple their children?**
- 7. Is our local church home visitation effective (both pastors and leaders)? What else can be done?**