



Tamil Annual Conference 46th Session

T.A.C Bishop's Address

Seek God's Glory Being

Salt &
light
Of the World

DATE: 12th -13th NOVEMBER 2021

PORT DICKSON, METHODIST CENTRE

SEEK GOD'S GLORY BY BEING SALT AND LIGHT OF THE WORLD

46TH SESSION OF THE TAMIL ANNUAL CONFERENCE

METHODIST CHURCH IN MALAYSIA

TAC Bishop's Address

12th to 13th November 2021

Warmest greetings to all of you in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord. I thank and praise God that He has graciously enabled us to meet physically once again. We pray that God will keep us safe from the very real threat from the virus. Some of our delegates are unable to attend and have given their apology, we look forward to a 'full conference' in the coming year. We are also very happy and glad that Bishop Dr T Jeyakumar is in our midst as our Bishop of the Methodist Church in Malaysia. I sincerely pray that all our deliberations and discussion of our 46th Session would bring much Glory to God. This year, we will need to take a serious look as to how we need to function in the post-pandemic era and also look at addressing our church growth issue.

1. **Remembering the decisions of our previous Quadrennium (Theme: Seek God's Glory).**
 - a. In 2017, we understood that we must allow God to take control of our churches. Neither Pastors nor leaders must never take opportunities to become the focal point, to take any glory. We also decided that pastors will set aside one-day of the week, only to do home visitation ministry. The Lay leader and LCEC Chairpersons would either follow the pastor or conduct their own visitations when they are able to.
 - b. In 2018, we agreed that both pastors and the lay leadership need to listen to one another and also pray with one another especially to bring about reconciliation which leads to restoration. We saw the need for spiritual warfare as some churches seem to go through repeated cycles of division and disunity. Such churches need to understand the dynamics of spiritual warfare as well as deal with the existing hurts and issues that are being used by the devil as his foothold.
 - c. In 2019, we took a decision to look seriously into the Christian discipleship that is actually happening in our families, among our young people and our children. We asked all local churches to re- evaluate all their discipleship programs. Unfortunately, within months of our conference session, the lockdown began.

d. In 2020, all our ministries became limited due to the Covid-19 Pandemic. However, it also forced us to review many things that we so often have taken for granted. We also understood the need to connect either through phone calls and even personal visits if necessary. We also saw the need to empower fathers and mothers to become the actual 'frontliners' of ensuring spiritual instruction and discipling their own families.

2. **Working out our God given theme in our local churches.**

- a. Our theme has been given both for direction and collective focus. Churches should seriously strive to allign themselves both with the Annual Conference as well as our General Conference theme.
- b. When we choose to listen and obey God's direction to our churches and the Conference that comes through the theme, we will surely prosper.
- c. In January 2021, i made it a point to attend all our seven District Pastor's Fellowship meetings (online) to share about how to understand and appropriate the theme in all our ministries.
- d. I have since requested the Board on Laity to help me facilitate a similar session with all our local church Lay Leaders and LCEC Chairpersons so that they too can understand the theme in a deeper way and also have a plarform to clear their doubts or queries.
- e. It is commendable that many churches are already undertaking ministries beyond the local church walls. For instance, we are glad to see at least one churches setting aside sizeable funds to strenghten the Bumiputera Churches in Sabah and Sarawak. Another churches have set aside specific yearly funds to help missionaries and mission work in Nepal.
- f. Local churches must seek God's guidance and direction to function as salt and light in our communities and be bold to venture where He tells us to go. We must be able to look beyond our 'Indian" and 'Tamil' label and reach out in love to the many who are in need of God's love. We must become salt and light wherever God places us.
- g. Further to this, I desire to see local churches partnering with more local and national level NGO's in order to be salt and light in our nation. Local churches should invite and support those who give a voice to those who are marginalized and rejected. There are many such groups. Some work to help fight against police related custodial deaths, take up orang asli rights, those who deal with migrant issues and even environmentalists will need our support.

- h. Only when we do this that our young ones and all members feel that their own church has given them the opportunity to harness and use their faith to become involved and find that their faith is both relevant and much needed in all the national level issues that they are being exposed to daily.
- i. As i mentioned in my address last year, this is not just about giving our money but also praying for them and also participating in their activities. When this happens, our faith begins to engages societal concerns. For far too long our faith has been limited as a 'personal' or at the most, a 'church' matter. Our children, youth and all our members must be exposed to the realities that surround us and be given an opportunity to something about it.
- j. Churches could choose to engage with certain groups either as quarterly projects or some as yearly projects. The whole church, including our agencies, can adopt one project and work on it.
- k. Booths could be created in a corner of the church to generate greater awareness and participation. We should also be praying for these concerns during our Sunday morning worship and generate discussions on it in our cell groups as well.

3. **Functioning as a Local Church in the Post-pandemic era.**

- a. The pandemic has given us an opportunity to re-look and re-evaluate all our ministries. We must not just re-start everything back to rush back to all our 'old' routines. We must ask ourselves whether we really want to keep doing what we did before and also whether God wants us to do them in the same way again.
- b. For instance, in many churches, the online Bible studies and online prayer-gatherings have brought about greater participation from our members. The local church LCEC can always decide to continue using these platforms. We don't have to go force ourselves to go back to a physical Bible study or prayer gatherings.
- c. I am deeply concerned and would like all churches to help those who are against vaccination measures. Although these individuals have chosen this for themselves, this will become a hindrance for their participation in our physical worship gatherings. They may either be misguided or even fearful. Local leaders and pastors must visit and teach them what is right in the sight of God.
- d. Moreover, the challenge of our 'online only' members need to be addressed as well. The Bible teaches us very clearly that we must not neglect the coming together for

worship. Though the pandemic has curtailed our physical gathering for Worship Services, this alone cannot be the reason to miss church worship anymore.

- e. In my observation, all our Conference Boards have benefitted much from having their meetings online. Previously, we have experienced a lack of participation from Board members who were away from the Klang Valley area as they had to travel two hours or more just for a one-hour meeting.
- f. Similarly, our monthly online prayer is something good that needs to continue.

4. **Youths and Young Adults for full time ministry.**

- a. This continues to be an area of concern as we are struggling to cope with the need for theologically qualified pastors to lead our 54 Local Churches. We are only managing because of the help we get from 8 retired pastors and 10 Lay Pastors.
 - b. We are indeed glad that Mr Jayaprakash (Pastoral Candidate) and Ms Suzannah Ruben (Missions Candidate) will be available for ministry placements next year.
 - c. This means that at present we only have two pastoral ministry candidates (Mr Paul Davidson and Mr Immanuel Tharumakan) and two missionary candidates (Mr Jerry John and Mr Sharvin).
 - d. However, it is an answer to prayers that 4 young persons have since committed themselves for full-time ministry. They have all been interviewed by the Board on Ministry.
5. Two more youths (one in TMC Seremban and another in TMC Kuala Lumpur) are being mentored by their local pastors. We thank God for them.

6. **Finance matters.**

- a. We thank God that despite the lockdown, many have been tithing regularly to ensure that all local church ministries are not hindered in any way. However, some local churches have had to dip into their Fixed Deposit Funds in order to manage their payments.
- b. We would really like to see some of our financially able churches within the District to function as 'Big Brother' churches and help smaller churches to meet some of their needs.
- c. It is a matter of concern that some of our church treasurers are still not copying their monthly remittances that goes to AEC. Pastors and leaders must ensure that treasurers copy all transactions to the Finance Board Chairman, Conference Treasurer and Mrs Mercy our Finance officer at Wisma TAC.

- d. Our designated AEC account is now with the AFFIN Bank. The TAC office spends much time and effort tracing all the unidentified payments and bank-ins,
- e. I am glad that we have already received full repayments from three churches that went through misappropriations. Only TMC Taiping is pending, where a monthly repayment of RM 500 has been agreed upon.
- f. I wish to appreciate the commitment and sacrifice of the Finance Chairman and Treasurer who work hard and come by to the Wisma TAC often to sort out pending matters.
- g. Once again, I have attached the local church financial guidelines as Appendix 1. Please make photocopies and pass it on to all LCEC members.
- h. **KOPTAC:** The TAC Cooperative continues to give much better yearly dividends compared to fixed deposit returns. This year they have ventured into two more agriculture-based projects as well as growing their insurance base.

7. **The Methodist Church in Malaysia.**

- a. The continuing part of the General Conference will take place in August 2022. Please submit all petitions by the 31st of December this year.
- b. Let us continue to support the monthly, Sunday Prayer Gatherings that brings the entire Methodist family together in prayer. Next year, we will be having the Methodist Prayer Convention as an online event. This will be from the 20th to the 22nd of May 2022, Please keep the date free.
- c. This year we have continued to give Rm 10,0000 to support the Persidangan Misi Sengoi Bumiputera ministry and also gave RM 7,590 to the Sarawak Iban Annual Conference pastor's salary scheme as part of our efforts to empower Indigenous Christians.
- d. Our churches need to be made aware of the Hope Vocational Centre in Sitiawan which is provides a wonderful opportunity help many of our academically less-qualified young people. Delegates must take brochures and information to put it up in their churches and inform all our members.
- e. Many of our children have benefitted much from our Methodist Education Fund (MEF) Scholarship assistance. The publicity for this is given out in early April each year to all local church pastors and leaders. Please get the information out to all the needy students. I appeal all churches to make conscious yearly allocations for this important ministry and not wait for appeal to be made first.

- f. The Council of Bishops has initiated the standardizing of the curriculum for Probationary Minister's Retreat as well as a guidebook for pre-marital counselling.
8. CCM INDIAN WORK COMMITTEE, FELLOWSHIP OF INDIAN DENOMINATIONAL CHURCHES (FIDC) AND CONSULTATION OF INDIAN CHRISTIAN LEADERS' ASSOCIATION IN MALAYSIA (CICLAM).
- a. Both Rev Jonathan Jesudass and Rev Joseph Yesupatham have applied for and attended the interview for CCM General Secretary on the 22nd of October 2021. They were the only applicants.
- b. The CCM Indian Work Committee will be meeting for a time of planning on the 6th of January 2022. We have since asked the Mar Thoma Church representatives to come on board as well.
- c. The CICLAM (Consultation of Indian Christian Leaders Association Malaysia) continues to meet regularly and has been actively facilitating good programs and prayer events.
- d. The FIDC (Fellowship of Indian denomination Churches) is a body that brings Indian Denominational Churches from Malaysia and Singapore together. FIDC Congress will be meeting on the 4th of December 2021 (Online) . Bishop Emeritus Robert Solomon is the keynote speaker. The Clergy Reps will be Rev Dr Dennis Raj, Rev James Ravindaren, Rev Samy Dass, Rev Kunabalan and Rev Vincent Dass. The Laity Reps will be Mr Michael Raja, Mr Guna David, Mr Steven Sekhar, Mrs Shanty Sekhar and Mrs Janshee Shamkumar.
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DIRECTION TO MOVE FORWARD

EVANGELISM AND CHURCH GROWTH IN OUR LOCAL CHURCHES

We Need To Focus On God, Seek His Grace For Growth And Not Be Deceived That We Can Somehow Do It By Our Own Clever Thinking And Ingenious Strategies.

Over the last quadrennium, only two new churches (GMC Kelana Jaya and TMC Paloh) have been formed as the 54th and 55th Churches in TAC respectively. Our statistics tell us that we have not been able to grow our local churches as much as we want to. What needs to be done and how we need to do it needs our immediate attention.

- Does God desire church growth? Definitely yes as he has called us to go and make disciples. Matthew 28:18-20.
- Will God help all our churches to grow? No, God doesn't bless or grow all churches as we could actually be discipling wrongly. Matthew 23: 15.
- God doesn't grow a divided church as it would only grow the existing divisions.
- God doesn't grow a proud church as it would only grow and deepen our pride.
- God doesn't grow a self-sufficient church as it would only lead to a church that is functions independent of Him. The Laodicean church in the book of Revelation (Rev. 3:14-20) is a good example of this.

We Then Ask, What Could Be Our Strategy?

- What is the Board on Evangelism doing about it? Have they failed to do their work? The Board of Evangelism is at a level where they can only facilitate, train and empower. They cannot do what local churches need to do at ground level within their own communities. The Board has always been willing to work alongside local churches but how many churches have actually approached the Board? When we say we know how to manage our churches and don't need the Board to teach us, that is pride. How would God grow a proud church?
- Let's have more training. Over the last decade, reports show that we have had School of Evangelism, Urban Evangelism seminars and even the Institute of Evangelism done at local, district and conference levels. They have not been translated into tangible outcomes. Those who have been trained need local church leaders' support. That can only come of the LCEC actually has a burden for the lost, not just the few who have been trained.

- Let's have a catchy theme. This has been done before. We had 'Absolutely Double' and GO: 'Each One Get One'. While we appreciate these efforts, we often assume that conference delegates and pastors will get motivated and excited by the theme and automatically bring down the vision to our local churches. Themes can only do so much; it is only God working in the local church that can make church growth happen.
- Let's have a five days of church growth Conference with a good speaker. This too may not be a good solution. Firstly, when we think that we can deliberate together and come up with our own solutions, it is pride. Five days of discussions may not even guarantee five additional souls in each of our churches. Secondly, deliberations would result in good plans that could be a general strategy but the reality is, every individual local church has its own local dynamics (just like the seven churches of Revelation). Only God can give us the solutions that are tailor-made for each of our churches.

WHAT DO WE NEED TO DO AS A LOCAL CHURCH LCEC?

We need to return to all our local churches and to seek God's presence for a time of repentance and dependence upon GOD alone. Let us humble ourselves in a genuine way. Let us tell God, we don't know what to do but our eyes are upon you (II Chronicles 20:12).

We must give GOD the full freedom to even remove some of the things that have lingered from the past. Scripture has taught us that we cannot put new wine into old wineskins. God will not do it. For a new anointing and new empowerment, the old must go. (Haggai 1:5-6)

Let us acknowledge that we have failed. If we are serious about new growth, there is no other way. We must not rush this process. Only when we humble ourselves that we will be given God's grace to grow as a church, in His time (1 Peter: 5:5-6).

A. We Must Remove Our Pride And Humble Ourselves To Acknowledge That Without GOD We Cannot Grow.

- Psalm 127:1 Unless the Lord builds.
- John 15:1-5 Without HIM we cannot bear fruit.
- Psalm 107:37-38 Only God can add the numbers.

B. Even When We Work Hard, Only GOD Can Grow Us.

- Hebrews 3:4 Only God.
- 1 Corinthians 3:6 Only God.
- Matthew 6:33 Put God first in everything and then HE will add all things.

C. Be Conscious To Join With What GOD Is Doing. Seek His Guidance.

- John 5:17 Our Father is constantly working, even now, in our community.
- John 15: 19 The Son can do nothing by Himself but joins the father's work.
- Matthew 9: 37 God has prepared the harvest, workers are needed.

D. Embrace Our God Given Theme.

- When we become **Light**, we attract all those who are in darkness. It also means that the darkness within us needs to be dispelled as well.
- When we become **Salt**, we become tasty. Good, tasty food is always appreciated and brings people from all over.
- Ask God how our own local church can become **SALT** and **LIGHT** to our community, our nation and in all the earth.

E. Let us not ignore this warning and wrongly blame God for our predicaments.

- Proverbs 1: 28-31 Those who choose their own way.
- Matthew 13:58 Jesus could not bless them.
- Psalm 126: 5-6 Let there be tears of humility, tears of repentance, tears that seek God's guidance and tears for the lost souls whom we meet every day.

Friends, I humbly ask all our pastors, delegates and leaders to bring this back to our local leaders who are in our LCEC. For far too long our Conference Visions and Directives end abruptly on the last day of the conference session and fails to reach and is not heeded by the local church leadership. This is another reason why we have not been able to see growth. Let us not repeat the same mistake again.

Acknowledgement.

- a. I wish to thank and appreciate Bishop Dr T Jeyakumar wise counsel, clear guidance and prayer support. He has been a great blessing to all our Annual Conference Bishops.
- b. I wish to place on record my sincere appreciation to all our District Superintendents, all our God given pastors and their families. You are a blessing from God to TAC. God Bless You always.
- c. I thank the Conference lay leader Mr. S. Selvaraj and his associates for their prayers and support. On the same note, I also wish to thank all our lay members who pray for and work together with the pastors to care for our local congregations in TAC.
- d. I am indeed grateful to all our EXCO members who I view as assets to TAC, the Conference Secretary, the Conference Treasurer, all the Board Chairpersons and all the Agency Presidents who have given their best to God. These are our spiritual Leaders.
- e. I wish to add that our office staff Sis Mercy, Bro Shakespeare, Sis Jenytha (previous staff) and Sis. Nesamalar (new staff) have been a great blessing.
- f. My heartfelt appreciation also goes to the prayer team and all others in local churches who pray for me and my family on a regular basis. It is appreciated.
- g. Lastly, I wish to appreciate my wife Alice who is my daily prayer partner every morning and my children with whom I pray with every night.

Let us all pray and work together as God has given a new beginning after the difficulties we encountered during the pandemic. God will surely bless all our efforts if we decide to give ALL LAUD, GLORY AND HONOUR to Him alone.

‘THEIVANUKKE MAGIMEI, THEIVATHIRKE MAGIMEI’

Humbly Submitted.

In His Grace,

Rev Dr Dennis Raj

Tamil Annual Conference,

Methodist Church in Malaysia.

APPENDIX 1: Financial Guidelines for local churches.

The following guidelines were given to all delegates and also sent to all local church LCEC members in the previous years. Please print this out and share again as some LCEC members may be new.

- a. Two persons must verify and sign off the total amount of Tithes and Offerings collected each week.
- b. All the Tithes and Offerings must be banked in within the next three days. If the treasurer is unable to do so, they must delegate this responsibility to someone else who has been appointed by the L.C.E.C.
- c. Monthly accounts that are presented to the L.C.E.C must be accompanied with a copy of the last page of the month's Bank Statement. This is to ensure that the 'cash at bank' amount in the accounts is the same as the cash stated by the bank.
- d. Churches are strongly advised not to make cash payments if they are beyond RM500 but release the amount through Cheques/ Online payments instead.
- e. Treasurers must present all bank statements to the auditors and must not rush to get their signatures.
- f. Balance amounts that are carried forward from the previous month must always tally with the new month's opening balance, especially from the previous year (December) to the new year (January).
- g. Monthly audits are recommended as six months accounts can be overwhelming for some auditors. Additional External Auditors are advised for larger churches.
- h. Treasurers must submit / send Monthly Accounts to the TAC Finance Chairman (via e-mail)
- I. Churches who have difficulty in sending in their accounts or remitting their Commitment Fund may be visited by an Audit Team from the BOF to inspect their books as accorded in the Methodist discipline.