



PERSIDANGAN TAHUNAN TAMIL, GEREJA METHODIST MALAYSIA

தமிழ் வருடாந்திர மாநாடு, மலேசியா மெதடிஸ்ட் திருச்சபை

TAMIL ANNUAL CONFERENCE, METHODIST CHURCH IN MALAYSIA

T.A.C Bishop's Address

47th Session

THEME :

SEEK GOD'S GLORY BY BEING

*Salt &
light*

OF THE WORLD

Date : Nov 11th to 13th, 2022

Venue : Kinta Riverfront Hotel Ipoh

47TH SESSION OF THE TAMIL ANNUAL CONFERENCE

METHODIST CHURCH IN MALAYSIA

TAC Bishop's Address

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

Greetings to all of you in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord and savior. I pray that all our deliberations and discussion of our 47th Session would bring much Glory to God. We thank the Perak District for organizing this year's Annual Conference.

This year, i will not be reporting on the Property matters and Finance matters or give Board updates and Agency updates as it has already been given in detail by the respective Presidents and Chairpersons. This year, we need to focus more on our Growth Group agenda which we must wholeheartedly embrace as an Annual Conference. This is a vital step that will define the future of our Tamil Annual Conference.

1. Realizing our God given Conference Theme in our local churches.

- Last year, we asked all our local churches to have a time of waiting upon the Lord to seek God's direction on how to be Salt of the Earth and Light of the World in all the places that we have been established within the community.
- We requested each local church pastor and LCEC leaders to wait upon the Lord for direction as to how they need to function as salt and light of society.
- I am indeed glad to see many of our TAC churches reaching out in ways that they have not done so before. This is good and needs to be continued.
- However, there are also some churches that seem to be satisfied in doing things among themselves. There are several main reasons for this.
- Some think that they do not have the resources or are unwilling to go the extra mile to raise the needed resources to reach out.
- Some church leaders are simply satisfied with doing the same things in a cyclical way every year and do not want to be disturbed. This is a sad thing, as their own members are actually looking forward to the pastors and leaders to lead the church into a greater engagement with the community and society.
- Some other churches think that the Conference agenda, vision and direction is just an option and is therefore not taken seriously enough.

2. Asking God for new souls in all our worship services and meeting gatherings.

- This is a direction that was given to all our churches and members in the month of January this year, as this was something that we sensed from the Lord during the time of prayer during Board on Evangelism Retreat. A reminder to this was also sent to all our churches in the month of June.
- A number of churches are doing this faithfully and I commend them for this. They will surely be blessed by God as he has already told us that he will give us when we ask of Him in Matthew 7:7.
- Yet there are some local churches that have not taken this seriously. How can a local church expect growth and new souls become added when the LCEC leaders don't even spend 5 minutes praying for evangelism needs which is the actual primary agenda of the church?
- Have we become so arrogant to now think that we can grow and develop our churches without God?

3. Churches in need of pastors.

- There is a serious need for pastors and local church leaders to mentor and develop new young people for full time ministry. I plead with all of us to pray much for this even as Jesus taught us in Matthew 9:37-38.
- At present, we are heavily dependent on re-deployed retired pastors, lay pastors and student pastors. We need to appreciate all their contributions as well.
- Currently, we are forced to see more and more churches needing to share pastors. The Appointments Board is often unable to fulfill all the requests that come from our local churches.
- Lay driven churches are the only other alternative that we may need to open for. To this end, it would be good for churches to equip their members with the needed training either through STM or our own Lay Academy.
- The Growth Group model that we will be undertaking is also the other way for all our members to have their pastoral needs taken care of.

4. Remembering to pray for all our Pastors and their families.

- All our pastors work hard wherever they are placed. They are the vessels that God uses to bless both our Local Churches and our Annual Conference. We need to pray for them and their families everyday.

- We need to continue remembering Rev Vinsant Rayar, his wife Mrs. Nirmala, Rev Kunabalan and Ps. John Mathuni in our daily prayers. We thank God that they are recovering well. We also continue to pray for Ps. Jack who is still recovering from the bad accident.
- We also continue to pray for the grieving families of the Late Rev T.D. Peter and Rev David Tharmakan. Both of them were once strong stalwarts of TAC.

5. Appeals for Sri Lanka and the Southern District accident victims.

- We are truly thankful to God for the very encouraging response from all our churches.
- Please note that we always strive to release all the money that we receive from the churches for the particular cause.
- Only in exceptional cases, when some churches send in their money much later (even one month after the closing date is over), we redirect it to the Social Concerns Disaster Relief Fund. This is because the special accounts have already been closed and audited.
- The Sri Lanka Relief Fund accounts can be found in the MMM report.
- The Southern District Accident Victims Fund can be found in the Board on Social Concerns Report.
- As the Pakistan Flood appeals is still ongoing and is being undertaken by the MCRD, let's support them as well. They have already made their first visit and identified the local partners.
- Once again, I wish to thank all the churches that responded generously and immediately to the appeals.

6. The Methodist Church in Malaysia.

- We are grateful to God for the Special Session of the General Conference that took place at our Port Dickson Methodist centre in August. A number of decisions were made to reflect the changing times that we live in.
- In the light of the changes, the new Methodist Discipline is in the process of being printed and will be made available soon.
- Our Board on Ministry will report on how we as TAC will be utilizing the Rules Governing Marriages. There are a few clauses where we have to differ.
- We are also thankful for the pre-marital counseling material that has been produced in English. Both Rev Samy Dass and Mrs Janet Tevaraji were part of the team that helped to produce this. Please get it from Mrs Mercy.

- I also ask all our TAC churches to both contribute and also benefit from our Methodist Education Fund Scholarship assistance. The publicity for this is given out in April each year. Many of our TAC students have benefitted much from this.
- Some have not ordered the Methodist Diaries on time and therefore will not be able to get one this year. Please order early to avoid disappointments.
- Rev James Ravindaren and Ms.Rebecca Jeyanthi (TMC Ulu Kelang) have been elected into the Judicial Council.
- Mrs Rachael James (TMC Tamil Settlement) has been appointed into the Discipline Review Council.
- We are also privileged to have Mr Augustus Jeremiah, our Finance Board Chairman as the head of the AEC (P) Admin and H.R. team.
- I wish to ask all our churches to support and reach out to the Orang Asli ministry that is taking place in Sitiawan. More information will be furnished soon.

7. CCM INDIAN WORK COMMITTEE, FELLOWSHIP OF INDIAN DENOMINATIONAL CHURCHES (FIDC) AND CONSULTATION OF INDIAN CHRISTIAN LEADERS' ASSOCIATION IN MALAYSIA (CICLM).

- We are thankful to God for the election of Rev Jonathan Jesudas as the new CCM General Secretary. Its an honor to have a TAC pastor helming this important position. We believe that all his previous inter-faith engagements would surely be utilized for the benefit of all our churches.
- The CCM Indian Work Committee is now headed by Rev Isaac Pandianathan from the Anglican church. This year we had a session with younger ministers at the Zion Cathedral in Brickfields. We also had a time of combined prayer over Zoom on the 30th of July.
- The CICLAM (Consultation of Indian Christian Leaders Association Malaysia) is a registered body that meets regularly. Their main priority is to bring together all the Tamil Churches in Malaysia. Rev David rajiah (Anglican) is now the current Chairman.
- The FIDC (Fellowship of Indian denomination Churches) is a body that brings Indian Denominational Churches from Malaysia and Singapore together. The AGM that was held this year saw Rev James Nagulan from ETAC coming into leadership.
- We need to work together for God's Glory with all the churches in our vicinity, even if they are from other denominations.

8. NATIONAL CONCERNS

- In the political front, the upcoming general election is something that we continue to pray for. Please ensure that all our members are registered and also take time to cast their votes on the 19th of November.
- I ask all our Churches to pray for our nation and its well being in all our Sunday worship services. We need to ask God to give us good and upright leaders.
- As i emphasize each 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 in our prayer cells as well.

9. Looking Forward

- Deepening our discipleship agenda through the ministry of Growth Groups in all our local churches will be our primary focus in the coming years. It is given as attached.

Acknowledgement.

- I sincerely thank Bishop Dr T Jeyakumar for his friendship, guidance, assistance, and prayer support. I appreciate all the other Conference Bishops for their genuine solidarity and wonderful fellowship.
- I am grateful to all our EXCO members, the Conference Secretary, the Conference Treasurer, all the Board Chairpersons and all the Agency Presidents who have given their best to God. I see them giving their time for God in a sacrificial way.
- I wish to add here that Mr Selvaraj and both his associates have always been very envcouraging.
- Our office staff Sis Mercy, Sis Nesamalar and Bro Shakespeare have been a great support. Bro. Jesu has always been obliging whenever he is called upon.
- My heartfelt appreciation also goes to all those who pray for me and my family on a regular basis.

All Glory, Praise and Honor to God alone who gives me His daily dose of strength and Wisdom to fulfill His call in my life.

Humbly Submitted.

In His Grace,

Rev Dr Dennis Raj

Tamil Annual Conference.

Methodist Church in Malaysia

TAMIL ANNUAL CONFERENCE
GROWTH GROUPS IN LOCAL CHURCHES

Thus far, most of our local churches in our Conference have only followed one model of weekly ministries. Every week, we have Sunday Worship, there is one Bible Study, one Prayer Cell, one Area Fellowship gathering and one day of pastoral visitation. While it outwardly looks sufficient, generally, very few members attend prayer cell and the Bible study. In some cases, the area fellowship gatherings are organized in homes to celebrate Birthdays, Anniversaries and even memorials. To address the general lack of discipling platforms, we need to embrace changes in the way we approach to develop our local church ministry.

In the coming years, the Growth Groups model of discipling our members is needed to grow the spiritual level of our members, the spiritual leadership in our local churches and a deeper level of fellowship among our members. Eventually, each growth group will grow and new growth groups with new leaders will be created. We need to bring changes to the way we do our discipleship so that we will not become irrelevant to our own members. Worst still, we just we just repeat and repeat what we are doing regardless of the outcome, which leads to decline and disillusionment among our members.

Why do we need Growth Groups in all our local churches?

- Currently, there is a general lack of deeper discipleship among our members. We have many generational Christians who lack a deeper experience of spirituality in their daily walk with God.
- There is also lack of deeper engagement with the Bible. Most of our members just hear one sermon a week and think that is enough for them to grow spiritually.
- There is a lack of deeper fellowship. The time of engagement after a worship service is severely limited and is very often quite superficial.
- We also see a lack of new leaders who are willing to take up new ministry portfolios in the local church LCEC.
- In many churches, most local leaders are unable to exercise spiritual leadership and are only able to function as capable administrators.
- Very often, the full burden falls solely upon the pastor to care for the spiritual needs of all the members.

- The pandemic taught us that decentralizing our gatherings was very helpful and could be done quite efficiently.

How are churches expected to organize Growth Groups?

- The church LCEC and the pastor will need to organize small groups of our members that are generally not more than 14 persons.
- The local church pastor and the small group coordinator will need to appoint and train suitable small group leaders for these groups.
- Each meeting would be within one hour. Some Growth Groups may want to meet physically every week.
- Some Growth Groups may even want to meet over Zoom or Google meet every week.
- They can possibly meet from 8pm to 9pm in any of the weekdays or even choose to gather on a Saturday morning.
- They could meet anytime when there is no other program taking place in the church.

What will happen during a one-hour Growth Group gathering?

- There will be a time of Studying God's Word and deeper level discussion.
- There will be of sharing of personal concerns.
- There will be a time of praying for one another.

What do we expect from the development of Growth Groups?

- We can expect our members to have a greater engagement with the Bible and apply it in their personal lives.
- We can expect our members to have a 'support group' within the larger church that cares for their spiritual and emotional needs.
- We can expect the emergence of spiritual leaders who can disciple others. These will be leaders who can disciple others by teaching them, praying for them and caring for them.

What would the Biblical / teaching materials come from?

- Some churches already have a series that they have been following.
- The Board on Ministry will offer different lessons that the church finds suitable for their local church.

- All our local churches are different. Each church will need to know what the best material for their own church would be.
- It could a study that is either based on the books of the Bible or have a thematic approach.

Who will train our local leaders?

- Although the local church pastor can be entrusted to do this, the Board on Laity will also be a good resource.
- We also have Dr Prem from DUMC and others who have much experience in developing small groups in local churches.
- Although it is best done at a local church level, a District level gathering for training may also be possible.
- Every local church must have three steps. Step One is to identify the leaders. Step Two is to train them. Step three is to have quarterly gatherings with the pastor to receive feedback and to help them further.

What about the local church agency fellowships?

- Their own Sunday programs would go on as usual, as these are ‘fellowships’ that have their own age and gender-based needs.
- However, we expect Growth Groups to be formed within the agencies. For instance, a local church MYF may have two groups functioning, the MW having another two, the MYAF having another two groups etc.
- The President and another person can lead these groups as they meet during the week.

What happens to Bible Study and Payer Cell?

- Each local church will decide on how they would want to do this.
- I must add that there may be a desire for a dedicated group of people who want meet for weekly prayer in church. This should not be hindered in any way.
- As all our members should ideally belong to any one of the small groups, they will be blessed to grow by studying God’s word and praying together within the Growth Groups.

Is this a Methodist way of doing things?

- John Wesley himself was part of a Small Group. It was called 'Holy Club' where both spiritual nourishment and spiritual accountability was the primary focus.
- Our Methodist Discipline has an entire section that focusses on the formation and development of small groups. (Section XI. Para 143 of the 2016 Discipline).

Is this related to our Conference theme of being Salt of the earth and Light of the world?

- Yes. Very much.
- Our Saltiness comes from our innate discipleship and spiritual growth, which duly takes place in our Growth Groups. How can we be salt of the earth if we do not have saltiness?
- None of us can produce our own light. Our light comes from our deeper engagement with Jesus who is the light of the world. This comes through the Growth Groups as well.

Are there any churches where Growth Groups cannot be formed or will not work?

- Yes. It is a possibility due to two main reasons.
- Firstly, this would mean that some existing Local Church LCEC leaders do not want to be trained to function as spiritual leaders as they are either unable to or unwilling to disciple others. By refusing to lead a Growth Group, they only want to remain 'administrative' leaders who give ideas, organize events and programs.
- Secondly, it means that the church is not keen to seek growth by making the needed changes but want to remain latent even when the church is not being productive.
- Change is always difficult. However, if we ourselves are not willing to change things will become bad to worse. Things may seem outwardly strong but are very weak inside.
- We have come to a season where people are already moving out to churches where they can grow deeper and lead others through their giftings. Growth Groups give them the opportunity to do both.
- We have also come to a stage where people choose to go to a church where want to be spiritually cared for by the leaders. People move away from our churches as they are not interested in being a member of a church where leaders have nothing more to offer, other than managerial skills.

Reporting Mechanism and Timeline.

- All our local church pastors and the LCEC members will need to take ownership and begin to work on the formation of suitable number of Small Groups.
- A new way of reporting will be introduced to local churches that would focus on the small groups.
- The intended timeline has been given below as we intend to work out all the details in different stages.

Conclusion

The small group way of reaching out to the needs of our members is not entirely new. Although Jesus was busy ministering to the masses, He consciously grew the 12 disciples by keeping them close to himself. If we really desire to grow as a local church, we must be willing to embrace new dimensions of ministry.

All our pastors need to prayerfully appoint, empower and encourage all our existing LCEC leaders and other new leaders to lead a Growth Group unit. This what the Bible teaches us in 2 Timothy 2:2. We pastors must understand that this is an integral part of our pastoral ministry as we consciously create a reliable pool of spiritual leaders during our tenure of ministry in a particular church.

The lay leadership in all local churches must also arise to develop themselves to take on the spiritual responsibility of discipling a small group of people under their care. We must not be afraid or feel unapt. God will sure give us the needed grace to teach, pray and care for those under our care. When God who calls us into such a ministry, he will always be with us to see us through.

Thank You and God Bless You.

In His Grace,
Dennis Raj

