

Synod Moderator's "Gospel Word in Season"

Strengthening Faith, Strengthening Family

Jun 2023

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ of our Presbyterian family of churches in Singapore. The World Health Organisation (WHO) has officially declared the official end to this unprecedented COVID-19 pandemic.

How are you? How is your family, your work, your church and your ministry before and after this pandemic? My prayerful concern is the spiritual tragedy if we entered and came out of this pandemic with no greater love, worship and trust in Jesus as our Saviour Lord. The book of Revelation declares Jesus as the Alpha and Omega of history (22:13). He is the one to whom God has handed all authority and before whom every knee shall bow (Philippians 2:5-11). We need to ask: "Is Jesus increasingly Lord of my story?"

Revelation 9:20 holds a dire warning for us: **"The rest of mankind, who were not killed by these plagues, did not repent of the works of their hands nor give up worshiping demons and idols of gold and silver and bronze and stone and wood, which cannot see or hear or walk,²¹ nor did they repent of their murders or their sorceries or their sexual immorality or their thefts."**

In Revelation 9:20, God warns us about hardening our hearts to natural and manmade disasters which are unleashed in his sovereignty to "wake" us to repent and find eternal salvation in Christ, the Lord of history.

May we not be spiritually blind to God's salvation patience – beckoning and waiting for all nations to hear the gospel and repent (2 Peter 3:9). May we heed God's gracious warnings calling us to genuine humility in the face of our hopeless fragility, mortality and eternity. Where will we be without Jesus' love, sacrifice and redemption for us? Let us humbly acknowledge Jesus' Lordship over our nation, churches and personal stories.

1. Our historic moment as a Nation

(Romans 13:1-7 & 1 Timothy 2:1-8)

We praise God that Singapore has passed laws to protect the definition of marriage against legal challenge. Law and Home Affairs Minister K. Shanmugam reiterated that the constitutional change would protect the heterosexual definition of marriage along with laws and policies based on that.

He said: "Just as we have been clear about repealing 377A - we took a clear position - we are equally clear, and this government is very clear, that we will protect the heterosexual marriage as a key institution in our society."



2. Our historic moment as Singapore churches

This is an answer to our humble prayer to God and our sincere plea to our government as Singapore embarked on a national discourse on repealing s377A last year. It is a small window of God's sovereignty and our human responsibility to be prayerful, responsible and measured as fellow citizens of Singapore in seeking to retain our faith distinctiveness while carving out common space in the midst of our diversity.

Minister Shanmugam - in an interview with The Straits Times - referred to The Presbyterian Church in Singapore (PCS) Statement of 2018, which was written in the aftermath of the Penal Code being struck down in India. The gist of our PCS Statement requested for s377A not to be repealed unless and until these are guaranteed in our Constitution:

- that the religious rights of adherents of God's design for marriage are protected;
- there would be no legalisation of same-sex unions and
- that laws will not penalise those who do not support the homosexual lifestyle.

3. Our historic AGM and watershed moment for PCS

This historic legislative moral milestone of preserving family coincides with God's blessing upon us in PCS. We stand at the cusp of a Golden Age or opportunity to share the gospel in our nation and our region. It is, therefore, no coincidence that our theme for our Synod & Presbyteries is "**Strengthening Faith, Strengthening Family**".

A) Praise God for his blessing to “unlock” our Telok Kurau (TK) land for his salvation purposes.

We must really praise God that we can finally monetise our TK land - one of the few physical assets that he has graciously blessed us our denomination with historically. Never in our PCS history have we ever had \$40m! I like to acknowledge the many people who were part of God's story to be good stewards to optimize our TK land.

Much thanks to Rev Stephen Gan who led the Hub Committee so doggedly over the years to explore many possible proposals but each was sadly met with statutory roadblocks. I quote from the proposal he wrote in 2011 to promote the Hub.

- **2001:** For those of you who were involved with the Synod ministries over the last 10 years, you would recall that the idea to redevelop our Synod land at Telok Kurau (better known as TK Land) was first mooted in 2001 at the Synod AGM. Reverend Chris Chia (ARPC) presented a paper on 'The Presbyterian Centre' to optimize the use of TK Land. He proposed unlocking the value of our assets and relocating our Presbyterian Ministries, namely the Synod HQ, the Presbyterian Community Services, Serene Garden, and Andrew & Grace Home to the TK Land to forge unity and establish a common identity.
- **2008:** At the 2008 Synod AGM, the then Rt Rev Phua Chee Seng was given the mandate to convene a Property Committee to explore the sale and redevelopment of TK Land.
- **2009:** An offer to purchase our TK Land for S\$25million was rejected at the 2009 Synod AGM. We thank God that the land price has since escalated substantially.

- **2010:** A year later at the 2010 Synod AGM, a proposal by the Property Committee to redevelop our TK Land was highlighted and deliberated. In short, the current proposal is neither new nor recent but is a cumulative outcome of a series of deliberations at our Synod AGMs since 2001."

In 2022, our Asset Management Committee (AMC) chaired by Tony Lee picked up this baton. Finally, after much perseverance, God opened the door for a suitable developer to purchase the TK land for a 103-year lease. This is such a blessing as we get to retain beneficial ownership of our 999-year property while optimizing its financial returns for gospel ministry.

Thus, at our 2023 Synod AGM in March, our delegates overwhelmingly approved setting up a new Synod Investment Committee, which is so ably led Dr Ho Yew Kee. We also endorsed a financial roadmap that was presented to retain the value of our capital while having enough annual returns to finance our Synod and Presbytery staff, ministries and offices to serve our PCS.

B) We must turn God's blessings into God's Glory

We must now pray against three Satanic temptations of our flesh:

- To NOT trust in money as god, but always trust wholly in God who blesses us.
- To NOT fall into "a spirit of entitlement" of "who should get what".
- To NOT squabble over money and squander good inheritance like bad children.

Instead, we should pray earnestly for three Godly passions:

- For God's Word to grant us wisdom to turn earthly blessings into eternal ones.
- For God's Spirit to empower us to grow in our holiness and to evangelise friends.
- For God's Glory to grab us as we imitate Jesus' love & unity (Ephesians 3:14-21).

May we beseech Jesus our great high priest to be faithful stewards who long to hear the most precious commendation from Jesus: "Well done, good and faithful servant" and to fear the most terrifying words of the Lord Jesus: "I never knew you. Away from me you evil doers!" (Matthew 7:23).

Snapshot of Religions

Buddhists:	40% (1.95m)
Non-religious:	18% (873k)
Christians:	16% (775k)
Muslims:	14% (673k)
Chinese:	7% (339k)
Hindu:	4.1% (198k)
Sikh:	0.5% (24k)
Bahai:	0.1% (4.8k)

The task before us is great. Overall, the population census (see table on the left) of the number of Christians in Singapore is stagnant at best and shrinking at worst. The number of non-religious is outstripping Christians. Our world is increasingly hostile to God. People reject the reality of Satan and sin as old fashioned and bigoted ideas.

The number of evangelicals in Singapore – Anglicans, Methodists, Presbyterians, Bible-Presbyterians, Lutherans, Baptists to name a few - is about 7.8% of the population. A minority of our mainline churches are growing. The majority of churches experience these characteristics (see table on the right).

I have shared these stark realities in many churches, denominations and circles both here and around the world.

“Reviving” our mainline churches between 40 to 180 years?

1. Aging Membership
2. Missing adults (mid 20s-30s who don't stay in parents' church)
3. Restless youth (leaving for mega churches or leaving faith altogether).
4. Fewer marriages & higher divorces.
5. Falling birth rates leading to shrinking Sunday School
6. Out of touch Services, sermons & ministries
7. Disunited pastors and leadership.

There is unanimous consensus that this more true than it is not. The most explosive gospel growth is in South America and Africa. The latter will have the most Christians this century, overtaking USA and China.

4. Our PCS Futures Roadmap & Your Part

Our PCS churches, like most churches around the world, have been caught up in a Covid19 "fire-fighting" crisis mode. Let us see this as God's sovereignty to awaken us to our strengths and weaknesses as God's church.

This disruption to many of our churches' stagnant mode can be turned by God through fire-fighting this pandemic to embark on a "Futures Roadmap" (see right).

We need to ask: "What might God want to disrupt of our lives, homes and churches"? Conversely, we also need to reflect on what might God want to accelerate.

What God hates and loves of his people is clear from the Old to the New Testament. God has always hated nominal worship.

In the New Testament, James puts our sinful half-hearted worship this way: "You adulterous people! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God" (James 4:4).

We must confess and repent of nominal worship. We must close the gap between "churching on Sunday" and "churching at home". We must stop decoupling Sunday from every day discipleship. We must recouple every aspect of our redeemed lives to Jesus as Lord. He is over all and in all. He is all that matters. (Colossians 3:11).

God's questions about ourselves

Our Pastors
Our Leaders
Our Sunday Services
Our Evangelism
Our Discipleship
Our People (kids, youth, adults & elderly singles, marrieds & families)
Our Mission (niche local outreach & overseas mission)
= Loving, united and holistic Inter-Gen Church for God's Glory

What you can do personally

God tells us to put on the full armour of God to take our stand against the Devil's many schemes. We are called to "pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the Lord's people" (Ephesians 6:18). In obeying God's call, let us embark on this weekly habit:

- **Dedicate Saturdays as "Synod Sundays".**
Pray for the love, humility and unity of our PCS pastors, elders, deacons and leaders. Pray for our children, youth, elderly, singles, marriages and families. Then, go to church each Sunday with thankfulness & eagerness to help your leaders serve God.
- **Dedicate Sundays as "Salvation Sundays"**
Pray for your family's and friends' salvation. Pray for the 700,000 migrant workers on our shores. Praying for God to use Singapore as his Antioch to bless South-East Asia and the world. Pray that we will be "Blessed to be a Blessing".
- **Dedicate Weekdays as "Shining Days"**
Pray for God to use us in our daily witness at our schools, marketplaces or homes. To seize every opportunity and make our conversations seasoned with salt. Don't be ambitious or defeated by the task. Seek to be faithful. Depend on the Spirit's power.
Make our life count for Jesus by praying for ONE divine appointment to bless ONE person each day. These are small steps we can each take to strengthen faith and strengthen family to fulfil God's Great Commission.

Your brother & fellow servant,
Pastor Christopher Chia
Moderator